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**BRANDS WE LOVE TO HATE:
AN EXPLORATION OF BRAND
AVOIDANCE.**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
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ABSTRACT

Brands, and the process of branding, are of considerable importance in both marketing academia and practice. Although most research has focussed on the positive attitudes and behaviours that consumers have toward brands, there is a growing interest in anti-consumption. This thesis contributes to anti-consumption research by exploring the phenomenon of brand avoidance.

Earlier studies investigating the avoidance of brands have been one-dimensional, failing to account for the wide range of reasons underlying brand avoidance. Therefore, this thesis addresses the limitations of existing models by providing an integrative and comprehensive approach to understanding brand avoidance.

As an anti-consumption phenomenon, brand avoidance concerns the negative interaction between consumers, as social actors, and brands, as meaningful objects, within a social and historical context. Therefore, this thesis adopts an interpretive approach, a social constructionist epistemology, and historical realist ontology. Since research in the immediate area of brand avoidance is limited, this thesis employs a grounded theory methodology to analyse, code, and generate theory from the qualitative data gathered through 23 in-depth interviews.

Four main types of brand avoidance (experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral) and the circumstances in which brand avoidance may be restricted or alleviated (avoidance antidotes) emerge from the data. Existing literatures are used to further inform these findings and an original negative brand promises framework is developed to help increase understanding of the brand avoidance phenomenon. The main components of this research are then integrated into an emergent theoretical model of brand avoidance. This model offers a synopsis of how the various brand avoidance constructs may relate to one another and to other pertinent branding concepts within a consumption system. Combined, the findings of this thesis provide a comprehensive appreciation of why consumers avoid certain brands in addition to potential insights that may be used in the management of brand avoidance. Overall, this thesis contributes knowledge to the growing field of anti-consumption research by providing an innovative overview and an integrative understanding of an under-explored domain, brand avoidance.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“The creation of meaning via consumption involves both positive and negative choices.”

- Professor Margaret Hogg (1998 p.133)

"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning."

- Bill Gates (Microsoft)

“Oh my God! Starbucks!!! I hate Starbucks... Oh there are many reasons; they make sh*t coffee. It’s horrible! It’s really bad tasting coffee, and you can never get a decent size, you can’t just get your average normal cup of coffee you have to get a bucket, which then costs twice as much and tastes bad... and the whole multi-national thing... they're really slow... and they're wasteful! They have individual plastic spoons and there's extra packaging and stuff. So Starbucks I avoid, I’d rather not have a coffee than drink a Starbuck's coffee.”

- CI (First sensitisation interview)

The broad domain of anti-consumption, and the specific topic of brand avoidance, has steadily become more interesting and pertinent to scholars, managers, and consumers. The quotations above are evidence of this, as are the increasing number of academic and managerial articles, journal special issues, popular books, magazines, and websites dedicated to the subject area of anti-consumption (Banister and Hogg 2004; Englis and Soloman 1997; Gabriel and Lang 1995; Hogg and Banister 2001; Holt 2002; Klein 2000b; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Rumbo 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006; Zavestoski 2002a). Yet, despite this growing interest, the extant literature still lacks a comprehensive understanding of anti-consumption and its related topics. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to explore, in depth, a specific type of anti-consumption, ‘brand avoidance’, and in doing so contribute a more complete and integrative understanding of the area.

This introductory chapter begins by defining brands and brand avoidance. The problem that anti-consumption poses to contemporary marketing practice and the failure of existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of brand avoidance will also be discussed. The objectives of this thesis are then stated and the practical and academic justifications for this study put forward, followed by a section outlining the potential contributions. Finally, an overview of the thesis structure will be outlined at the conclusion of this chapter.

1.1 Definition of Brand

When close attention is paid to the extant literature, it becomes apparent that most studies in the area of anti-consumption actually focus on dissatisfaction with products and services, or counter-cultural phenomenon such as voluntary simplification and consumer resistance (Banister and Hogg 2004; Craig-Lees and Hill 2002; Halstead 1989; Hogg 1998; Kozinets 2002; Oliver 1980; Penaloza and Price 1993; Zavestoski 2002b). Therefore, with the exception of a few researchers (Holt 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson et al. 2006), the unit of analysis in most anti-consumption studies has been general product or service categories, rather than specific brands. Since this research looks at the anti-consumption of *brands*, it is necessary to clarify the concept that will be the focus of this thesis.

The term 'brand' is often taken for granted; most consumers are able to name many brands and will recognise a company's branding effort when exposed to one. Furthermore, although branding is pervasive and there is a significant amount of brand literature and empirical research, marketing academics still struggle to agree upon one single definition of 'brand' (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; Stern 2006). Nevertheless, the notion of the brand as a 'multi-dimensional value constellation' is a convincing idea that underlies most conceptualisations of 'brand' (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998 p. 436-437)¹. This 'holistic' view of the brand is distinct from the traditional 'product centric' view of the brand (Ambler and Styles 1996). The 'holistic' perspective posits that a brand's value constellation could mean many different things to a consumer, for example: a legal instrument, a logo, a promise/covenant, a risk reducer, an identity, a value system, an evolving entity, or a corporation (Ambler and Styles 1996; Balmer and Gray 2003; Berry 2000; Brodie, Glynn, and Little 2006; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1997; Erdem and Swait 2004; Erdem, Swait, and Valenzuela 2006).

Essentially, the value constellation that a brand consists of and the meaning it represents, are all stored in the consumer's memory as a network of associations (Keller 1993), and the brand becomes a bundle of information to which consumers respond accordingly. Thus, at the most basic level, brands are bundles of meanings. However, if this broad conceptualisation is adopted in this thesis, the notion of a brand could be mistakenly applied to most names and symbols. Indeed, any word that is able to stand for a constellation of values or act as a bundle of meanings may

¹ See Appendix 1 for de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley's (1998) list of brand meanings.

be incorrectly considered to be a brand. Therefore, this thesis posits that there are three important criteria that all brands must satisfy:

- 1) A brand must be able to *signal* or *indicate* that one entity is distinct from another. The AMA defines a brand as a tool that is able to *identify* the goods and services of one source from that of its competitors (AMA 2006). Indeed, at the most basic level, this is what a brand must be able to accomplish. If a brand cannot be used to identify one group of products/services from another group of products/services, then the branding process is fundamentally flawed. Thus, the process of branding signals to the consumer that brand X is not the same as other brands.
- 2) A brand must be able to convey more meaning about the entity, to which it is associated, than the simple fact that it is not the same as other brands. Thus, flowing from the first point, a brand must *communicate* extra meaning that helps to *differentiate* one brand of products/services from any other product/service. For the consumer, knowing that a product is produced by Company A and not Company B is not very important information. However, if extra meaning is associated with Company A, for example, it is an organisation that produces reliable and cost effective products, then branding something as originating from Company A suddenly becomes more meaningful. As mentioned earlier, this extra meaning is made up of a constellation of values (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998) and is stored in the consumer's mind as a network of associations (Keller 1993). The ability to convey large amounts of information with one brand name or one logo is what makes branding such a powerful marketing tool. The brand acts as a bundle of meanings, and according to symbolic interactionism, a person's actions towards any brand are contingent upon what that brand means to that person. Also, in accordance with symbolic interactionism, the meaning of a brand constantly undergoes a process of interpretation by the consumer, where it may be maintained, altered, or given extra meaning. This co-creation of brand meaning is prominent in marketing literature (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1997; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thompson et al. 2006), and is of particular relevance to this thesis. Normally, a brand is created by a company to represent a bundle of positive meanings. Thus, if a brand is perceived as a promise of reliable performance or a positive consumption experience to a consumer, then his or her behaviour towards that object, and other similarly branded

products/services, will be based on those positive meanings. However, as this thesis will demonstrate, the meanings that brands represent do not always remain positive. As a consequence, behaviours directed at some brands may be based on the negative meanings that they represent to consumers. In any case, an essential criteria of a brand, is that it must be more than a tool for identification. It must also act as a communication tool that imbues an object with extra meaning. Thus, brand X is not the same as other brands, specifically because of the unique meaning associated with brand X.

- 3) There must be commercial intent associated with a brand or the notion of altered worth/value. The concept of brand equity is what separates brands from symbols, names, and other general cognitive categories that are also able to act as bundles of meaning. For instance, it is common to refer to celebrities as brands, and this is not incorrect since their names are able to be used to increase profitability, but only because the celebrity names represent a constellation of values which convey 'extra meaning' to many people. For everyday people who do not possess this level of fame, their name is simply used for identification, contains little additional meaning to other people beyond their immediate social circle, and are rarely used for commercial purposes. Thus, the names of 'ordinary' people cannot be considered brands, unless they are developed into, or marketed as, something that can be used for business related purposes. Similarly, the act of 'country branding' augments a country's name from a mere label into something that is able to be of use commercially. The belief that products made in Germany are of superior quality, or that a vacation to New Zealand will be clean and green, illustrates that these country names have undergone a process of branding. The names of these countries have moved beyond mere labels to the status of 'country brands' and are now able to be capitalised upon, in a commercial sense. Therefore, the final criterion of a brand is that it must be able to alter the 'value/worth' of the entities with which the brand is associated. The three criteria of branding work together; thus, brand X is not the same as other brands because of the unique meaning associated with brand X, which also alters the commercial value/worth of brand X.

Usually the intention, from a marketing perspective, is that a brand name increases the worth of an object. A brand is considered an asset, or has positive equity, when it

adds value to the firm by influencing customers favourably. In other words, a brand with positive customer-based equity adds value to the company because it helps to enhance and sustain cash flow for the company and its shareholders (Srivastava, Shervani and Fahey 1998). The superior financial performance of some brands is generated through the consumer's willingness to pay a price premium for the branded service/product; increased brand awareness and familiarity leading to faster adoption rates and market penetration; brand loyalty leading to repeat purchases; perceptions of higher quality and reduced risk; and other positive brand associations (Aaker 1996). Similarly, Keller (1993) states that a brand has customer-based equity when consumers act more, or less, favourably to the brand than an identical product or service that is un-named or fictitiously named. Finally, Berry (2000), also suggests that brand equity may be positive or negative. Positive equity is the relative advantage a brand name has over its competitors, while negative brand equity is the marketing disadvantage linked to the brand.

Two points are evident. First, it is clear that brands are important to marketers and positive brand equity is a valuable component of a company's brand asset. Thus, any research that increases knowledge in the area of brand equity makes a valuable contribution to marketing in general and brand management in particular. Second, there is a negative component to brand equity, although this idea has never been sufficiently considered. In exploring the incidents where the association with a brand name actually reduces the worth of, and preference for, an object, this thesis contributes to the notion of negative brand equity.

1.2 Definition of Avoidance

The preceding section established the definition of 'brand' that will be used in this thesis and briefly acknowledged the notion of negative brand equity. The term 'avoidance' will now be discussed in order to set the parameters of this study. The concept of 'brand avoidance' is rarely mentioned in marketing literature and has never been formally defined. In fact, only two academic articles have explicitly used the term 'brand avoidance' (Oliva, Oliver, and MacMillan 1992; Thompson et al. 2006).

In a study of dissatisfaction, Oliva et al. (1992) offer the concept of 'brand avoidance' as the anti-thesis of brand loyalty and use the term 'avoidance' synonymously with brand 'switching'. To date, that is the only article that has attempted to define brand avoidance. Oliva et al. (1992) suggest that satisfaction leads to brand loyalty while

dissatisfaction leads to brand avoidance/switching. As this thesis will demonstrate, though dissatisfaction is indeed a precursor to brand avoidance, many other constructs also contribute to brand avoidance. In addition, brand avoidance and brand switching are not the same phenomenon. Brand switching is a one-off behaviour that involves a consumer exiting one negative experience and entering another consumption relationship. In contrast, although brand avoidance may include brand switching, this thesis adopts the view that brand avoidance also involves the ongoing rejection of a brand.

The second article that mentions brand avoidance is a recent study on anti-*Starbucks* discourse (Thompson et al. 2006). They posit that consumers are sometimes motivated to avoid brands that have used emotional branding strategies in the past, but have since developed inauthentic brand meanings. Innovatively, Thompson et al. (2006) suggest that managers should keep track of their brand's health by paying attention to doppelgänger brands. They define doppelgänger brands as sardonic imitations of an actual brand, circulated in popular culture by consumer activists who aim to dilute the marketer's intended message. However, the term 'brand avoidance' is not explicitly defined in Thompson et al.'s study (2006). Furthermore, though their findings are corroborated by this thesis, their study does not look at the other motivations for brand avoidance that this thesis will demonstrate can, and do, exist.

Owing to the lack of appropriate definitions for avoidance from marketing academia, the first contribution of this thesis is to provide a definition of brand avoidance. This thesis defines brand avoidance as a phenomenon whereby consumers deliberately choose to keep away from or reject a brand. Support for this definition may be derived from psychology. In psychology, the term 'avoidance' is used as a motivational descriptor, whereby 'avoidance motivation' is behaviour "instigated by negative or undesirable events or possibilities" (Elliot 1999 p. 170; Markus and Nurius 1986 p. 961). Therefore, by incorporating the psychological definition of avoidance, we can further characterise brand avoidance as the behaviours and attitudes consumers have regarding a brand, as motivated by the negative meanings/consequences associated with the brand.

A key concept in this study of brand avoidance is the 'anti-constellation', or product sets that are rejected by consumers. Coined by Hogg and Michell (1997), 'anti-constellations' consist of two types of anti-consumption behaviour, 'non-choice' and 'anti-choice'. 'Non-choices' are made up of products or services that are beyond the means of the consumer, and therefore, are beyond the consideration set. Non-

choices consist of three factors, affordability, availability and accessibility (Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg and Michell 1997). In contrast, 'anti-choice' is defined as products and services that are within the means of the consumer, but are "positively not chosen because they are perceived to be incompatible and inconsistent with the consumer's other consumption preferences and choices" (Hogg 1998 p. 135). 'Anti-choice' consists of three factors that progressively increase in affective intensity: abandoning old consumption habits, avoiding consumption, and aversion owing to strong emotional dislike for a brand (Hogg 1998). Since the three components of anti-choice (abandonment, avoidance, and aversion) overlap to some extent (Hogg 1998), for the purposes of this thesis the three shall be grouped into one concept, termed 'avoidance' and, therefore, this thesis could be considered a study on the 'anti-choice' of brands.

The concepts of the 'evoked', 'inert', and 'inept' sets are also of relevance to this thesis. Narayana and Markin (1975) propose that an 'evoked' set consists of the options a consumer would consider purchasing. An 'inert' set comprises the alternatives which the consumer knows of, but does not perceive as being any better than their currently selected options. In other words, the consumer's attitudes and intentions to purchase the items in this set remain 'inert'. Finally, the 'inept' set, which is most relevant to brand avoidance, comprises the options that the consumer has resolved not to purchase for various reasons, such as a bad experience, or negative feedback from various sources.

Narayana and Markin (1975) conducted exploratory research providing a few examples of why participants placed certain toothpaste brands into their 'inept' sets. The main reasons for negative evaluation of toothpaste were a dislike of the advertisement and poor product performance. However, since then very few scholars have expanded on the concept of the 'inept' set, the exception being a study of tourists (Lawson and Thyne 2001). Lawson and Thyne (2001) suggest that perceptions of physical danger, cost, cultural difficulties, and a disapproval of the country's political system were the main factors that cause a destination to be placed into a tourist's 'inept' set.

In general, most studies focus on the 'evoked', or consideration, set. Even with the extensive amount of research conducted on consideration sets, specific examination of the 'inept' set would still prove fruitful, especially since it is not appropriate to assume that the information used to base purchase decisions are the same as the information used to base rejection decisions (Abougomaah, Schlater, and Gaidis

1987). In two surveys of 100 and 180 consumers, it was concluded that 'extrinsic' factors such as price, availability, and salesperson's recommendations were most likely to influence rejection of a brand (Abougomaah et al. 1987). The author of this thesis argues that the previous classification is too simplistic, especially since the rejection of a brand owing to issues of price and availability could actually concern the 'inert' set (or non-choice) rather than the 'inept' set. As this thesis will demonstrate, there are many more reasons contributing to brand avoidance.

According to the definition provided by this thesis, brand avoidance occurs when consumers are motivated to reject a brand because of the negative meanings/consequences associated with that brand. Therefore it is important to stipulate that this research is primarily concerned with brands that consumers actively *choose* to avoid, and not unconscious acts or scenarios under which consumers have no choice. In other words, brands that are not purchased because of issues concerning price, availability, or accessibility will not be included in this study. The exclusion of those elements is justifiable, since avoidance due to lack of money, accessibility, or availability, is inevitable and therefore does not advance knowledge of brand avoidance. Therefore, this thesis deals with Hogg's concept of 'anti-choice' rather than 'non-choice' (Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg and Michell 1997), and 'inept' sets rather than 'inert' or 'evoked' sets (Abougomaah et al. 1987; Narayana and Markin 1975). Thus, the study of brand avoidance aims to understand what motivates consumers to place certain brands into their 'inept' sets, or 'anti-choice' constellations, even though they have the finance and ability to purchase and access these brands.

1.3 Problem Identification and Thesis Objectives

To date, the majority of marketing scholars and practitioners have espoused the many positive aspects of branding and brand equity, and have focused primarily on brands as market-based assets (Srivastava, Fahey, and Christensen 2001; Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1998). Consequently, this perspective of brands has resulted in an emphasis on exploring the reasons behind why consumers select brands and how firms can increase brand loyalty. In consumer research, the notion that people express themselves and construct their identities/self-concepts through the brands and products they use has been well documented. Consumers tend to select brands with images that are congruent to their self-concepts, or those that will add desired meaning to their lives (Aaker 1999; Dolich 1969; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Heath and Scott 1998; Hogg, Cox, and Keeling 2000; Levy 1959; McCracken

1989; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983). Therefore, it is widely established that brands are often selected for the many positive benefits/meanings they represent to the consumer.

However, equally valid is the idea that some people avoid certain products and brands because of negative associations/meanings (Banister and Hogg 2004; Englis and Soloman 1997; Levy 1959; Thompson and Arsel 2004). Yet, until recently (Banister and Hogg 2004; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson et al. 2006), the notion of consumers rejecting specific *brands* to avoid adding undesired meaning to their lives has received little attention. As a consequence, the negative characteristics of brands, and their potential to become market-based liabilities for their firm, have not really been addressed by marketing academia and practice. Thus, this is one problem that this thesis aims to address.

Additionally, a recent special issue on branding in *The Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* suggested that “One area ripe for future research is the issue of negative brand meaning” (Stern 2006 p.222). This thesis, which was conceived well before the 2006 special issue, directly addresses the issue of negative brand meaning by specifically exploring why consumers avoid certain brands².

In today’s marketing environment, consumers are becoming more sceptical, cynical, difficult to satisfy, and elusive (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1998; Rumbo 2002; Zavestoski 2002b). Decades of brand proliferation and advertising clutter has resulted in a reduction of true brand loyalty and an increased likelihood of brand switching by consumers (Aaker 1996; Brown and Dacin 1997; Ehrenberg, Barnard, and Scriven 1997; Keller 1993; Kent 1995; Kent 1993; Rumbo 2002; Webb and Ray 1979). Some consumers are now displaying attitudes and behaviours counter to what marketers’ desire. Certain consumers go so far as to resist or revolt against the businesses they perceive to be domineering (Holt 2002; Klein 2000b). Their attitudes and behaviours may be classified as ideologically motivated acts of consumer resistance, such as protests, boycotts; counter-cultural festivals like Burning Man; and various acts of consumer activism like ‘*adbusting*’ or ‘culture jamming’ (Klein, Smith, and John 2004; Klein 2000a; Klein 2000b; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Rumbo 2002; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson et al. 2006). More commonly, regular consumers have been shown to

² The author of this thesis does not dispute the power and value that a successfully managed brand can add to its firm. This thesis simply argues that a balanced perspective towards branding is required.

reject brands/products that do not convey a meaning that is appealing or congruent to their sense of self (Fournier 1998; Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001), or brands/products that fail to meet their expectations (Halstead 1989; Oliver 1980). The problem, from a managerial perspective, is that even though more consumers are exhibiting anti-consumption attitudes and behaviours, conventional brand management literature offers few strategies for dealing with brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours (Thompson et al. 2006).

From an academic perspective, a similar problem is that although anti-consumption behaviours are increasing (Zavestoski 2002b) or, at a minimum, experiencing a 'revival' (Klein 2000b); there is a distinct lack of research exploring the phenomenon, when compared to mainstream consumption research. A more specific problem is that despite there being some important works that have drawn attention to the area of anti-consumption and filled an important gap in consumer research, there are several limitations within the existing studies.

First, research in this area is more often than not, one dimensional. Given that a brand is a complex multifaceted construct (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1997; Keller 1993; Stern 2006), it is only logical to assume that brand avoidance may also be multi-dimensional, yet the majority of research in this area has focussed only on uni-dimensional reasons for anti-consumption. Thus, a major gap in current anti-consumption theory is its inability to account for the wide range of brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours that may exist. As this thesis will demonstrate, the complex nature of a brand means that a single brand may be avoided for a plethora of reasons, and although the underlying motivations for each of these reasons may be quite different, all of them are equally valid. Therefore, a main task that this thesis undertakes, which prior work has not achieved, is to explore and integrate the multiple reasons for brand avoidance within one study.

Another shortcoming of existing studies concerns the failure to look at the limits of anti-consumption behaviour. Specifically, anti-consumption researchers rarely question if, and why, some consumers continue to purchase certain brands despite their obviously negative attitudes towards the brand. A related limitation of prior studies is that they have not delved into the explicit circumstances that could change a consumer's mind in terms of repurchasing an avoided brand. The importance of understanding what factors may restrict brand avoidance has obvious relevance for the management of the phenomenon.

To address the limitations of previous studies in the area of brand avoidance, the following research questions have been developed that will guide the remainder of this thesis.

- 1) What brands are avoided by the consumer?
- 2) Why do people avoid certain brands?
- 3) What prevents or stops brand avoidance?

Having identified the problems in marketing academia and practice, this thesis contains several objectives. At the broadest level, this thesis explores consumer behaviour and branding; thus, the overriding purpose of this thesis is to contribute knowledge to the field of anti-consumption. However, three specific objectives are to:

- 1) Explore the avoidance of brands from a multi-dimensional perspective.
- 2) Consider the circumstances that restrict or alleviate brand avoidance.
- 3) Offer a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of brand avoidance.

To date, no single study within the specific realm of brand avoidance has attempted this combination of tasks before.

1.4 Academic and Practical Justification

In addition to the problems identified earlier, such as the recent changes in consumer behaviour towards brands and the scarcity of research in the specific area of brand avoidance, there are other academic and practical reasons that justify this thesis topic, thereby making its contributions significant.

The growing area of anti-consumption (Zavestoski 2002a), focuses on all phenomena that is 'against' consumption. This area serves as both a valid and innovative approach to the academic investigation of consumer behaviour and the understanding of consumption culture in general. Brand avoidance is, essentially, an exploration of why people reject the consumption of certain brands, even when their financial circumstances allow them the option to purchase. Consequently, brand avoidance acts as a link between the two areas of anti-consumption and branding research.

In the area of symbolic consumption, there is a growing perspective that consumers have a clearer understanding of what they do not want, as opposed to what they

desire (Banister and Hogg 2001; Banister and Hogg 2004; Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg et al. 2000; Hogg and Michell 1996; Hogg and Michell 1997; Ogilvie 1987; Patrick, MacInnis, and Folkes 2002). Similarly, some scholars argue that negative information and what a person dislikes, have an equally great impact on consumers' decision-making and say just as much about a person as favourable information and what a person 'likes' (Aaker 1996; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Arnd 1967; Bettman, Luce, and Payne 1998; Bourdieu 1984; Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991; Lutz 1975; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990; Wilk 1997a; Wilk 1994; Wilk 1997b). These perspectives have the potential to inform the study of brand avoidance. Indeed, the main rationale behind studying avoidance behaviour is because people may define themselves not only by the things they consume but also by the things they avoid consuming (Wilk 1997b). As Bourdieu (1984 p. 56) suggests, preferences or tastes are defined by the "refusal of other tastes". He further adds that "in matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation". Brand avoidance, then, is likely to be a result of: dislikes/distastes and negation, as well as negative: information, symbolism, experiences, and/or perceptions. Therefore, an exploration into why people avoid brands, rather than why they select them, not only contributes knowledge to the areas of negative symbolic consumption and negative consumption experiences, but may also reveal much about consumption behaviour in general. Simply put, to fully understand the positive preferences of consumers, marketers must also delve into negative preferences.

Nowadays, brand target markets are often international, with some companies attempting to reach a larger and more diverse group of customers. Added to this is the increased competitiveness of the global market place and the ability of the internet to connect customers with companies almost anywhere in the world (Achrol 1997; Holt, Quelch, and Taylor 2004). A more dispersed market in terms of demographics and culture means that there is also a higher probability of marketing messages having different outcomes when they are communicated to different people. Since the target market is more diverse, the firm can not presume that any core values they wish to convey will be taken at face value or even interpreted as intended. Additionally, some values that companies wish to communicate through their brands may be lost during the communication process from source to receiver (Aaker 1996).

Even if most of the intended meaning is conveyed accurately through advertising, after decades of being marketed to, most modern consumers are now highly knowledgeable about the markets with which they engage. For this reason, some

consumers are more likely to be sceptical of company communications and more likely to scrutinise the firms responsible for the messages (Holt et al. 2004; Klein 2000b). Over and above this scepticism, are the additional associations that consumers may link to the brand; associations that are unaccounted for, or unintentional; for example, negative corporate reputation through media exposure (Holt et al. 2004; Klein 2000b). Certain brand meanings may be re-constructed or co-created during the consumption cycle, resulting in the creation of new meanings beyond the control of the firm (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thompson et al. 2006).

Of the communications that are received successfully and understood at face value, some may potentially result in the opposite of the desired effect. As mentioned earlier, consumers may avoid brands/companies whose associated values are considered symbolically or ideologically unsuitable/incongruent with their own self-concepts (Banister and Hogg 2001; Banister and Hogg 2004; Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Fox 1998; Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg et al. 2000; Hogg and Michell 1996; Hogg and Michell 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001).

Not only might marketing communications supply the wrong meanings to consumers, but another challenge may be the similarity of the messages being sent by companies. The proliferation of competing advertising material and brands, or 'clutter' (Kent 1995; Kent 1993; Rumbo 2002; Speck and Elliott 1997; Webb and Ray 1979), means that consumers not only pay less attention to ads, but they also perceive many brands to be similar (Aaker 1996; Brown and Dacin 1997; Ehrenberg et al. 1997; Keller 1993). Consequently, consumer loyalty to specific brands is difficult to establish and predict (Oliver 1999). In other words, the modern day market in developed countries has reached near saturation and most consumers are able to satisfy many of their needs and wants using multiple brands. This multi-brand loyalty means that any one of a number of alternatives in a consumer's evoked set may be selected, depending on circumstances (Abougomaah et al. 1987). In contrast, there might only be a few specific brands that consumers choose to avoid consistently. Thus, in terms of practice, though it is essential to be one of the many chosen brands, it is of equal importance *not* to be among the avoided brands. In terms of academia, much research has already focused on consumer choices towards brands, but with a brand saturated marketing environment, perhaps now is the time to focus more on the decisions consumers make when rejecting brands.

Furthermore, brand avoidance may arise from more than failed marketing communications. For instance, it could also be based on actual negative experiences of a brand at the utilitarian level, such as customer dissatisfaction with product or service (Halstead 1989; Oliver 1980; Swan and Combs 1976). Knowledge about the type of dissatisfying experiences that result in brand avoidance is useful to the brand manager.

Marketing practice is changing and influencing academic research priorities. The pinnacle of this paradigm shift was the redefinition of marketing by the American Marketing Association (AMA) in August 2004, from a focus on satisfying needs and wants, and delivering value, to the maintenance of relationships (AMA 2006). In the contemporary marketing environment, the transition from transactional to relationship marketing means that it is no longer adequate to simply focus on short-term goals such as customer acquisition. Instead, marketing managers are now expected to think about long-term goals such as customer retention, successful networks, and on broader topics that lie 'outside the traditional square' (Achrol 1997; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Gordon, McKeage, and Fox 1998; Gronroos 1994; Gronroos 1990; Gummesson 1987; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Vargo and Lusch 2004). In a similar vein, some researchers have asserted the importance of understanding the negative aspect of popular topics such as business relationships, brand loyalty, market-based assets, and brand meanings (Jacoby and Kyner 1973; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Srivastava et al. 2001; Stern 2006). In terms of this thesis, it is evident that marketing needs to concern itself with more than the formation of favourable attitudes and loyalty towards a brand. Equal attention needs to be directed to exploring anti-consumption, and more specifically, the negative relationships that consumers may have with brands.

1.5 Contributions

By explicitly exploring 'why consumers avoid brands' and the circumstances in which brand avoidance is prevented or halted, this thesis contributes to the area of brand avoidance in three ways. First, a conceptual framework is developed by integrating the extant literature with the themes discovered in this research. This framework provides, for the first time, a comprehensive understanding and conceptual overview of the brand avoidance phenomenon. Second, utilising a grounded theory approach, an emergent theory is generated to make sense of the relationships between the brand avoidance constructs and other relevant branding concepts within the greater consumption system, such as negative brand equity. Third, by exploring the

conditions in which brand avoidance may be restricted or alleviated, this thesis may be able to provide some potentially useful insights for brand management.

None of these contributions have been attempted before in existing literature; with the few studies in the area focussing on individual concepts such as dissatisfaction (Oliva et al. 1992), undesired self (Banister and Hogg 2004), authenticity (Thompson et al. 2006), and consumer resistance (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Not only does this thesis corroborate and combine the findings of previous research, it also identifies and integrates additional reasons that may influence consumers' decisions to avoid brands.

Knowledge of brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours not only contributes theoretically to an interesting and under-researched area, but also has practical implications. Marketing managers have traditionally concentrated on strategies convincing customers to select their brands. However, as this research will demonstrate, consumers do avoid certain brands. A current lack of research and knowledge relating to this area means that existing brand management literature offers little advice for dealing with brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours. Failure to acknowledge brand avoidance may lead to a 'branding crisis' (Thompson et al. 2006), resulting in unknown profit loss, degradation of reputation, shrinking market share, and other downward spiral effects.

The ability to discover and possibly change existing brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours in consumers should be considered an important long-term goal of any organisation that strives for better relationships with its existing and potential consumers. Overall, knowledge and strategies to deal with why consumers develop these brand avoidance attitudes could be a substantial advantage one company may have over its competitors.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

Since research in the specific area of brand avoidance is limited and because the existing studies in anti-consumption are narrowly focused, a more flexible approach is required to address the research questions and objectives outlined in this chapter. In chapter two, the 'Research strategy and methodology' of this thesis will be explained. First, the research paradigm adopted is discussed. Then the grounded theory methodology deployed by the researcher to gather, analyse, and generate theory from qualitative data will be outlined. Grounded theory has been deemed suitable in such circumstances where a new perspective is required and/or when

there is a lack of previous research in an area. A historical realist ontology, a social constructionist epistemology, and symbolic interactionist and hermeneutical theoretical perspectives are adopted for this thesis. In accordance with grounded theory, the research strategy begins by assuming that brands are shaped within a historical context. In other words, what a brand means, how it is used, and the values it conveys, all depend on the time and place in which the consumer exists. It is also assumed here that knowledge is socially constructed. Therefore, any knowledge gained regarding brand avoidance is constructed through the interaction between participants, data, and researcher, all within a societal context. Similarly, symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics suggests that in order to understand the meanings underlying brand avoidance, the researcher needs to interpret how brands are used as communication symbols from the participant's point of view, within a socio-historical context. In-depth interviews were the chosen method of data acquisition as they are an effective tool for gathering the rich qualitative data necessary for theory development in an under researched area. Chapter two also provides detail regarding the evaluation of research quality and issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter three consists of the findings and discussion for the reasons behind brand avoidance. It briefly provides an overview of the four main categories of brand avoidance before discussing, in depth, the motivations for brand avoidance.

Chapter four comprises the findings and discussion for the management of brand avoidance. It follows a similar structure to chapter three, it first provides a brief outline of the main themes that restrict or alleviate brand avoidance before discussing these themes in depth.

Since this thesis utilises a grounded theory approach, the treatment of literature differs from that of traditional functionalist theses. Specifically, literatures that help to inform the research question are introduced and incorporated throughout the discussion chapters. Basically, as the phenomenon develops during the course of research, the relevance of existing literature becomes more apparent and can then be drawn upon to inform and validate the emerging theory. Participant quotes are used throughout the discussion chapters to help illustrate the themes under discussion. Furthermore, chapters three and four have been structured to flow from the higher levels of abstraction down to the lower levels; this is to ensure that the reader has a 'top-down' reading experience. By first providing the main motivations behind each brand avoidance concept, the reader has a context that may make it easier for him or her to 'make sense' of the subsequent sub themes.

Chapter five provides an integrated view of this research. This chapter combines the reasons for brand avoidance and the circumstances in which brand avoidance may be prevented, restricted or alleviated into one theoretical model. This chapter also discusses the relationships between the emergent themes and other branding concepts relevant to this study of brand avoidance.

Finally, in chapter six, the 'conclusion', the main research findings are summarised, the contributions and implications are stated, the limitations are acknowledged, and avenues for future research pertinent to this thesis are considered.

CHAPTER TWO:

RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHOD

This chapter is divided into two parts. It first discusses and justifies the ontology, epistemology, theoretical perspective, and methodological approach of this research. The way in which these various topics relate to each other, and the position that this thesis adopts, is summarised and displayed in Figure 2 on page 38. The second part of this chapter, entitled '2.6 Methods and Procedures', discusses the tools and techniques that have been utilised to gather and analyse the qualitative data that is essential to this exploration of brand avoidance.

2.1 Ontology

Ontology is the study of reality; whether they are cognisant of it or not, all researchers enter a field of inquiry with assumptions about the nature of reality (Crotty 1998). These ontological suppositions determine the way in which researchers approach their study and the methodological approach they utilise. At one end of a continuum are realists who assume that a single true reality exists, independent of anyone or anything (Morgan and Smircich 1980; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). This reality is unchanging and governed by physical laws which may only be discovered by the researcher (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). At the other end of the continuum are relativists who reject the idea of a single truth. They argue that rather than being independent of people and immutable there are actually multiple constructed realities, all of which are changeable. In these cases, what is considered 'real', is relative to each individual and the socio/historical context in which he or she lives (Guba and Lincoln 1998; Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

This study adopts a 'historical realist' perspective of ontology (Guba and Lincoln 1998). The researcher assumes that in social sciences, reality is indeed relative to each individual. However within the field of marketing, reality is also situated within a historical context, one that has been formed by "social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors" (Guba and Lincoln 1998 p. 205). Thus, reality, in the case of historical realism, is socially shared, and the interaction between consumers and brands may be construed as 'real', at least within the temporal and culture confines in which a study is being conducted. Simply stated, consumers, companies, and stakeholders use brands to communicate with other consumers, companies, and stakeholders. However, brands are only 'real' when viewed from this point of time, in

this current society, and would be meaningless if taken out of the context from which they have been created.

2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns the relationship between knowledge and knower (Guba and Lincoln 1998). This study adopts a 'social constructionist' epistemological stance. Constructionism is the view that "all knowledge, and therefore meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty 1998 p. 42).

At this point it is prudent to provide clarification on the terms *constructivist* and *constructionist*. The difference between the two is best understood by viewing knowledge as either being individually or socially constructed (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). While constructivism refers to the "meaning making activity of the individual mind", constructionism refers to "collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes" (Schwandt 1998 p. 240). Since constructivism places the emphasis on knowledge constructed by individual experience, if positioned on a continuum, constructivism lies closer to subjectivism. As an epistemological viewpoint, subjectivism argues that the understanding of any phenomenon is a direct result of an individual's own sense-making and, as a consequence, all knowledge is subjectively understood (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). In contrast, social constructionism stresses the important role that society and culture has in influencing the construction of knowledge. As such, social constructionism may be positioned slightly closer to objectivism; the epistemological belief that any phenomenon may be objectively understood and that it is possible for the relationship between knowledge and knower to remain independent (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). However, it must be stressed that both epistemologies (constructivism and social constructionism) are predominately subjective in nature (see Figure 2 page 38). In relation to this thesis, the meaning a brand possesses and the reasons underlying brand attitudes and behaviour are constructed through the interaction between the brand, the consumer, and society; thus, the adoption of a social constructionist epistemology is appropriate.

Within social constructionism, a distinction is drawn between *weak* versus *strong* constructionism (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 2000). In weak constructionism the researcher attempts to understand a phenomenon through the

participants' experiences; therefore, emphasis is placed on description rather than the co-construction of knowledge. One may notice the slight objectivist leanings of weak constructionism. In contrast, strong constructionism views the researcher as an inseparable part of the research process; therefore pure description is not possible since the researcher's interaction will always influence the project. The end product will always be a joint construction between the researcher and participants (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991). Thus, although both weak and strong constructionism accepts that knowledge and reality are constructed, the role of the researcher during the knowledge construction process is 'weak' in the former. Alternatively, in the latter, the researcher plays a 'strong' part in the knowledge construction process.

During most stages of this thesis (interview, analysis, and interpretation), respondents and researcher will draw upon their respective life experiences to make sense of the brand avoidance phenomenon. Thus, any understanding of brand avoidance gained from this study is a result of the interaction between researcher and participants within an existing social context. Hence a strong constructionist view of knowledge acquisition/production is adopted.

2.3 Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical perspective is the philosophical stance that guides the researcher's approach to inquiry and his or her choice of methodology. This study adopts an 'interpretive' theoretical perspective.

In social science research, interpretivism has been used to describe a number of similar approaches to research and the underlying philosophical assumptions that accompany such approaches. It is a large umbrella term encompassing naturalism, humanism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Annells 1996; Crotty 1998; Guba and Lincoln 1998; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Klein and Myers 1999; Lutz 1989; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000; Thompson 1997).

The main goal of interpretivism is to understand the construction of meaning within a social phenomenon (Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Klein and Myers 1999; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000), one that is viewed within a "culturally derived and historically situated social world" (Crotty 1998 p. 67). The main assumption of interpretivism is that there are multiple realities, which are socially constructed, and to understand the meaning of a phenomenon, the researcher needs to partake in the process of *interpretation*. Owing to this interpretation of knowledge,

at some level there will be interaction (whether it is strong or weak) between the researcher and what is researched. As a consequence, interpretivism tends to fit well with social constructionism (Annells 1996; Crotty 1998; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 1998).

The interpretivist paradigm focuses on revealing the meanings of objects, through the description of events. The interpretive researcher attempts to shed light on a phenomenon of interest by 'gathering' the relevant data from participants whose experiences may help to inform the understanding of that phenomenon. Various coding techniques are utilised to uncover existing patterns. Theory generation and speculations that help gain insight into the phenomenon follow, and further data collection may ensue (Goia and Pitre 1990). Depending on the epistemological stance of the researcher and the type of interpretive approach taken, there may be more or less emphasis on preserving the participants' original representations. Thus, in some interpretive approaches, for example 'naturalism', various methodological precautions, such as triangulation, member checks, and independent audits (Wallendorf and Belk 1989), may be necessary to prevent the emergent findings or theories from being 'biased' or 'corrupted'. However, in saying that, usually a constructionist view of knowledge is recognised in most interpretive ventures (Crotty 1998; Klein and Myers 1999). Overall, interpretivists aim to understand meaning, within a complex and context bound environment, rather than seek an objective and generalisable truth. Interpretivism is particularly useful for the investigation of social phenomenon where reduction is impossible without changing the nature of the entity being studied (Hudson and Ozanne 1988).

The aim of this study is to explore the reasons for brand avoidance. A brand is construed or understood to be 'good' or 'bad', based on the meaning assigned to it by the participant and the society in which he or she exists. Thus, an interpretivist approach is well suited to this current study of brand avoidance, since it allows the researcher to reveal the meanings imbued in brands.

2.3.1 Interpretive approaches: Symbolic interactionism and hermeneutics

There are a variety of specific approaches within interpretivism, such as anthropological understanding, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and symbolic interactionism (Crotty 1998; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Schwandt 1998). Although the focus varies between each approach, all share the common goal of

understanding the meaning of social phenomena (Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). This thesis adopts a symbolic interactionist (Leigh and Gabel 1992; Solomon 1983) and hermeneutic (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994) approach. The suitability of these two theoretical perspectives for exploring brand avoidance, and consumer behaviour in general, are now discussed.

2.3.1.1 Symbolic interactionism

Conceived by George Mead in the 1930's and later developed by Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism focuses on understanding meaning as it is developed through an individual's interpretation of, and interaction with, others in society (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Symbolic interactionism is a theory of, as well as an approach to, investigating human behaviour (Annells 1996). In order to gain understanding of a phenomena, the researcher aims to see the world from the participant's point of view, and to interpret the individual's construction of meaning through their interaction with symbols within society; symbols such as language (Annells 1996; Crotty 1998; Solomon 1983). Since researchers can only gain understanding through interpretation, the resulting insight is just that, an 'interpretation', and can never be assumed to be 'truth' (Esterberg 2002). However, if the findings are rooted in observation, or 'hover close' to the data, then the interpretation provides a very close approximation to understanding the phenomenon (Esterberg 2002; Schwandt 1998).

The three tenets of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969 p. 2 cited in Crotty 1998; Esterberg 2002; Schwandt 1998) are stated below, followed by a brief discussion of how each tenet applies within the context of brand avoidance.

- 1) *The way a person acts towards something (objects, other people, and in the case of this thesis, brands) is based on the meaning that entity has for them.* With regards to brands and brand avoidance, the meaning a person associates with a brand will affect the way he or she acts towards it. For example, a person in the United States might avoid *McDonald's* because to them the brand means unhealthy food. However, a person in Brazil may avoid *McDonald's* because to them the brand may symbolise environmental abuse of their native rainforest.
- 2) *Meanings are derived through social interaction.* Brands and what they mean to individuals are constructed from that person's interaction with others in their social environment. Consumers cannot understand the meaning of

'overpriced' nor 'poor quality' unless they are able to compare their own experiences of appropriate quality and pricing with other peoples' experiences. A shoe that breaks in five weeks would be normal if everyone else's shoes broke in three to seven weeks. Likewise, a brand can only be interpreted as 'overpriced' if the consumer compares it to other brands or to what other people normally pay for similar shoes. This point also illustrates the compatibility between symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, and historical realism.

- 3) *Meanings are created, modified, or held constant by an interpretive process.* Brands by themselves do not convey any meaning. The meaning consumers derive from a brand are a result of the company communicating what they would like the brand to mean to the consumer, through advertising or by the experiences a consumer has with the brand. For instance, some people may interpret *Nike* to mean 'athletic' and 'competitive' since these are the attributes the company often communicates to its consumers. Others may interpret *Nike* to mean 'overpriced' because *Nike* may be more expensive when compared to other brands in their environment. Another person may take *Nike* to mean 'poor quality' if they had a bad experience with the product. In all of these examples, the person interprets the interaction they have had with the brand within a social context, and, based on that interpretation, the meaning of the brand is sustained, re-constructed, or modified.

Brands are multi-dimensional value constellations or 'bundles of meaning' that are used as tools of symbolic communication; thus, the concept of a brand is one that is socially constructed and co-produced. Accordingly, symbolic interactionism is an approach that is well-matched for this study of brand avoidance.

2.3.1.2 Hermeneutics

While symbolic interactionism is concerned with the interpretation of actions based on the meanings that has been given to objects within a social environment, traditionally, hermeneutics has been regarded as an approach to the understanding and interpretation of texts. However, since texts may also include interview transcripts, a hermeneutic approach is closely related to symbolic interactionism (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 1998). Hermeneutics has been discussed as both a methodology and a philosophical perspective (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Bleicher 1980; Crotty 1998; Gadamer 1989; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000; Thompson 1997; Weinsheimer 1985).

As a theoretical perspective, 'philosophical hermeneutics' focuses on the process of understanding and interpretation, and concerns itself with what it means to 'understand' something. It posits that researchers are not blank slates; instead, they always enter a field with their own life experiences. Hence, hermeneutics takes into account the socio-historical context in which the researcher exists and the influence that 'tradition' has on research and any understanding that is gained. Accordingly, it is assumed that the researcher will enter into the interpretive process with certain biases and prejudices (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Gadamer 1989; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000; Thompson 1997). Thus, before any inquiry has been conducted, the researcher already possesses an existing understanding of the culture in which the research will be conducted. However, instead of setting these 'prejudices' aside, they should be reflected upon, and engaged with, during the interpretive process (Schwandt 2000). Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) take this one step further by suggesting that the eventual readers/audiences of the research (this thesis) will also undergo a similar interpretative process. Thus, the way in which a reader will make sense of this thesis is inevitably influenced by his or her pre-existing knowledge, experiences, and prejudices.

In hermeneutics, these prejudices are sometimes referred to as 'pre-understanding' (Bleicher 1980). The notion of 'pre-understanding' is especially prevalent in consumer research, where the scholar is, inevitably, a consumer and the research is often conducted on the culture in which he or she lives. Hermeneutical researchers argue that, rather than being a disadvantage, this accumulation of life experiences and knowledge not only makes the interpretive process possible, but also more meaningful. Therefore, as long as the researcher is reflective enough to acknowledge his or her biases, and is willing to remain open to changing his or her existing beliefs, prejudice is not a problem (Gadamer 1989). In fact, it is this 'pre-understanding' that gives researchers a reference point from which they may interpret the data, thereby allowing them to make sense of which statements are important enough to code as emergent themes. 'Pre-understanding' allows researchers to compare what they have experienced in their own lives with what participants are saying about their experiences, thereby making the researcher more sensitive to negative cases, contradictory themes, and interesting discoveries (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Gadamer 1989). Without an existing view of brands and consumption, it would be very difficult for the consumer researcher to interpret anything meaningful. Thus, 'pre-understanding' is not only advantageous, but crucial to any interpretive endeavour.

Similar to other interpretivist approaches, in hermeneutics, the insight gained is co-created, or 'negotiated', rather than an objective reproduction of the event or phenomenon (Schwandt 2000). Thus, hermeneutics fits very well with the strong constructionist epistemology discussed earlier (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 2000). In a hermeneutical approach, it is expected that the researcher's 'understanding' of the phenomenon, the participants, the context, and self, will change throughout the interpretative process. In fact, during a hermeneutical endeavour, understanding does not occur until there is a "fusing of horizons" (Gadamer 1989; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992; Thompson 1997; Weinsheimer 1985), where pre-existing understanding is augmented by the new insights gained during research. As a result, at the conclusion of the research, the understanding of a phenomenon should be different and more informed/sophisticated than at the beginning (Crotty 1998; Guba and Lincoln 1998).

As a methodology, hermeneutics aims to create understanding by interpreting language, with a particular emphasis on texts (Crotty 1998; Thompson 1997). The understanding gained during the research process is developed by way of the 'hermeneutical circle'. Whereby, sense making begins with interpretation of a part of a text. The understanding is improved by considering the whole text and relating the new understanding back to the specific parts of the text. Texts are also compared to other texts, for instance, from other informants. New insights at any point of this 'hermeneutical circle' force the researcher to reconsider his or her previous understanding in light of the newly acquired understanding. Furthermore, this whole process of interpretation takes into account the historical and social context in which the text/informant and interpreter/researcher occupy (Thompson 1996; Thompson 1997).

In this thesis, hermeneutics is classified predominately as a theoretical perspective. It is similar to symbolic interactionism (because both aim to understand meaning within a social context) and fits well with the epistemological and ontological viewpoints of social constructionism and historical realism, respectively. However, the way in which data analysis is approached will, inevitably, be affected by hermeneutics. Hence, when relevant, the influence of hermeneutics on this thesis's method will be mentioned.

2.4 Methodology: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is the methodological approach employed in this thesis to explore the phenomenon of brand avoidance. Developed by Glaser and Strauss in the

1960's, grounded theory is a methodology heavily influenced by symbolic interactionism, as Strauss trained with Blumer (Achrol 1997; Annells 1996; Charmaz 1990; Charmaz 2000; Crotty 1998; Rennie 1998a). It is a methodology which allows the researcher to "find out" what is actually "going on" in a phenomenon, and to "generate theory from data" (Glaser 1978 p. 2). Since the main objective of this thesis is to "find out" why consumers avoid brands, and to develop an emergent theory of brand avoidance, grounded theory is considered an appropriate methodology.

2.4.1 Induction versus deduction

According to Glaser, grounded theory is "a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area" (Glaser 1992 p. 16). Whereas many methods of the 1960's used data only to test theory, grounded theory did the opposite, using data to discover it (Rennie 1998a). Most research in that era favoured experimental design, a methodology based on deduction and hypothesis testing. Contrasting itself against the predominance of lab work and logico-deductive methods, grounded theory was historically based on induction (Glaser 1992; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002).

In logical deduction, the researcher assumes there is an 'objective' reality which exists. Within that reality there are grand theories that have been and always will be there, dictating the way in which the world operates. The researcher must search for evidence to verify or falsify that reality (Esterberg 2002). Thus, theory exists first, from which hypotheses are created and then tested to deduce what is fact. This process is top-down or, theory driven.

Interpretivist paradigms are based on the principal that reality is interpreted or constructed, usually within a historical and societal context (Crotty 1998). Instead of seeking to verify the 'truth' which does not exist, interpretivist approaches aim to understand meaning. The popularity of grounded theory in this paradigm is partly due to its purpose of developing or discovering a theory that assists in understanding a phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Thus, as far as interpretivists are concerned, there is no objective reality and no grand theories that account for everything. For them, reality is interpreted either individually or socially, and may also be constructed (Charmaz 2000). One way of studying 'reality' is to let the 'understanding' of a phenomenon emerge from the evidence that is available. Thus, the researcher must allow the theory to be induced from the evidence which exists; this process is predominately bottom-up, in other words, data driven. At the same

time the researcher must keep in mind that all research, no matter how controlled, will always be a matter of interpretation and co-produced meaning.

Grounded theory emphasises the data driven nature of analysis and of allowing the theory to emerge from the data. This focus on the data seems to suggest that grounded theory is purely inductive, but this is a rather simplistic view (Bryant 2003). In most modes of inquiry, the researcher usually engages in both deduction and induction (Hair, Bush, and Ortinau 2000; Hirschman and Holbrook 1992). Grounded theory is no different; thus, contrary to common belief, grounded theory is actually a continuous process of inductive theory building followed by deductive verification, which is termed 'abduction' (Dubois and Gadde 2002). As the theory emerges from the data, new data is gathered to test the theory. Although the verification component of grounded theory should not be confused with the positivist form of logico-deductive hypotheses testing, grounded theory does emphasise constant comparison of the emerging theory with data (see Figure 1). Consequently, grounded theory possesses a 'built-in' verification/validation component (Charmaz 1990; Corbin 1998; Dey 1999; Glaser 1992; Glaser 1978; Goulding 2002; Rennie 1998a; Strauss and Corbin 1998), which is very similar to the hermeneutic circle.

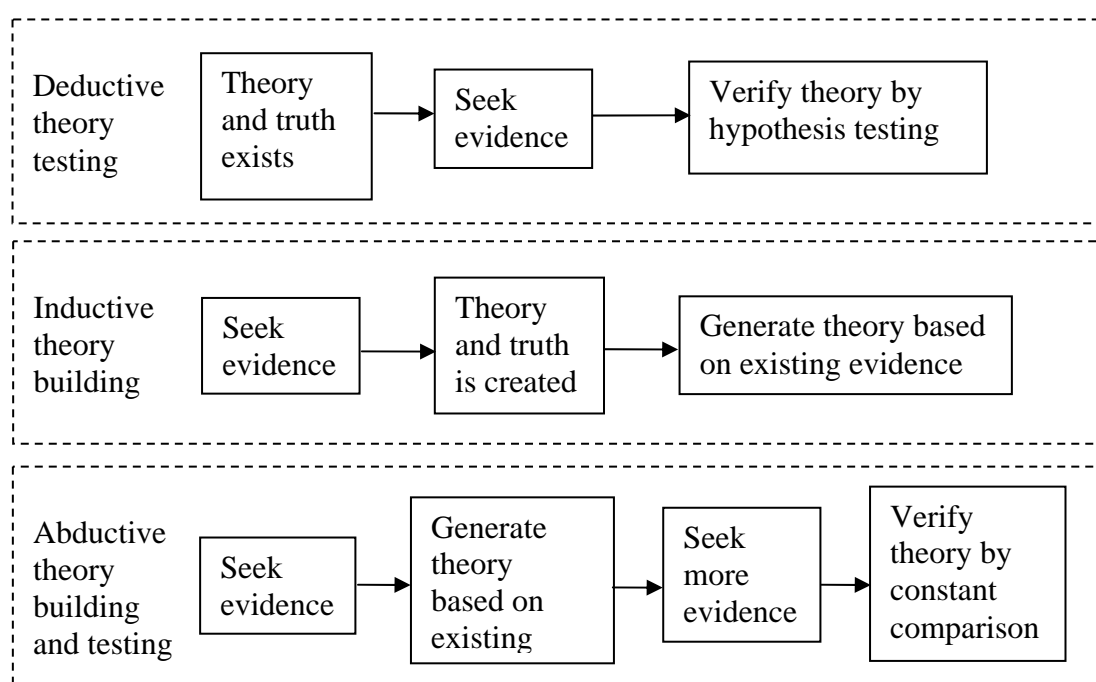


Figure 1. The role of theory and evidence in deductive, inductive, and abductive approaches to theory testing and building

2.4.2 Role of the methodology and the researcher

Stemming from sociology, grounded theory is suitable in situations where very little knowledge exists in an area or where a new perspective is required. It also works well when the phenomenon of interest is socially constructed; for instance, in the case of consumer behaviour towards brands in the market place. The main aim of grounded theory is to develop a theory that not only fits the data well, but also helps explain, predict, and interpret the social phenomenon rather than describing what happened (Glaser 2002). As Glaser suggests, "In grounded theory one simply generates a theory that will account for as much variation as possible in a dependent variable [phenomenon of interest], within the limits of the research and its resources" (1992 p. 104).

Although, the theory must be 'grounded in' the data, most grounded theorists believe that any analysis requires some degree of interpretation and co-creation of knowledge. The researcher's role is to interpret what has happened and from those findings further induce an emergent theory (Charmaz 2000; Corbin 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Therefore, the researcher cannot completely isolate him or herself from what he or she is studying. The resulting theory which emerges is, in reality, 'constructed' from informant data as well as the researcher's interpretation of the data.

Furthermore, the researcher should avoid 'premature closure' or under analysis of the data (Wilson and Hutchinson 1996). Thus, the grounded theorist must abstract from a description of the phenomenon to a higher level theory, otherwise the findings are not theories but merely descriptions of phenomenon (Charmaz 2000; Glaser 2002; Goulding 1998; Wilson and Hutchinson 1996).

2.4.3 Sources of data and existing literature

Since the objective of grounded theory is the generation of a theory that helps to explain a phenomenon, the sources used to inform the research may be quite variable. Although both qualitative and quantitative data may be used in grounded theory (Corbin 1998; Glaser and Strauss 1967), this thesis focuses on qualitative data in the form of interview transcripts.

In grounded theory, data gathering and analyses occur together and the process is essentially flexible in order to test various components of the emerging theory. Different sources of knowledge are acceptable in grounded theory: interviews and observations, past experiences, future expectations, self reflection, and even existing

literature. Selection of data, and where they come from, is guided by the emerging theory and is selected for theoretical relevance rather than statistical representativeness.

Since grounded theory is useful in situations where little research has been carried out, a lack of prior knowledge exists, or when a new perspective in an area is required, the role of existing literature in grounded theory is an area of debate. This uncertainty has probably stemmed from the original book, *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, where Glaser and Strauss remarked that “researchers often stifle potential insights by virtue of too strict adherence to existing theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p. 253). This message is repeated several times over the subsequent decades in their various works; for instance, in Glaser’s *Theoretical Sensitivity* “The danger is to force the data in the wrong direction if one is too imbued with concepts from the literature” (Glaser 1978 p. 31). However, what started as a cautionary stance has developed into a common misconception that being exposed to existing literature and theories in the specific topic area can result in the researcher entering the field with fixed ideas. The logic follows that preconceptions inevitably cause the researcher to force the data into preconceived categories or themes. This misunderstanding is noted by Dey (1999), Charmaz (1990), and Goulding (1999a; 2002). Thus, in revisiting the original works and the subsequent interpretations of grounded theory, the fundamental message is that reading literature is not wrong, as long as researchers do not enter the investigation with ‘conceptual straitjackets’ that cause them to force the data into existing literature or limits their creativity (Dey 1999). Dey suggests that providing the emerging theory is ‘grounded’ in data, and that the data drives the research, literature plays a very important role in grounded theory. He states that “there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head” (Dey 1999 p. 251).

Existing literature can be used in several ways. Strauss and Corbin (1990) draw the distinction between non-technical and technical literature. Non-technical literature are materials which can be used as further data to supplement interviews; for example, diaries, manuscripts, and reports. Non-technical literature has obvious uses, especially in case studies where additional documents may give extra credence to emerging concepts. Non-technical data was not used in this study because participants did not possess such materials concerning their brand avoidance experiences.

Technical literature consists of research reports and academic articles. Strauss and Corbin (1990) list five ways in which technical literature can be used in grounded theory:

- 1) To enhance the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher: Experience with existing literature can make the researcher more sensitive to emerging concepts during analysis, concepts which otherwise may take the inexperienced researcher longer to detect.
- 2) As another form of data: Grounded theory does not make a distinction between data gathered from actual participants and data gathered from literature. Thus, quotes and other descriptive materials found in the existing literature may be used as another form of data, and coded in a similar way as another set of information.
- 3) To guide researchers in knowing what to ask and when to ask it: Possessing broad knowledge of the area helps keep the researcher alert to potential links that may be related to the subject under exploration. It also allows the researcher to be aware of discrepancies between what a participant is saying and what the existing literature suggests should occur. This should lead to a deeper questioning which may challenge the status quo.
- 4) To assist theoretical sampling: The existing literature may give the researcher more ideas about where to gather data from.
- 5) To validate emergent findings: Existing literature may sometimes be used to inform or support the new findings. Alternatively, the new theory may not relate to any previous research. The main point is that the researcher should not be obsessed with using existing literature to defend every finding. The grounded theory process is data driven not theory driven; thus, it is not necessary to find prior literature that supports the research findings. Accountability to the data is the predominant form of validation for the grounded theorist.

Points 1, 3, and 5 were the main ways in which existing technical literature was used in the context of the current study.

2.4.4 Different perspectives in grounded theory

Like any other methodology grounded theory is not without its limitations. The following sections will address the different perspectives that exist within grounded

theory. It is unlikely that agreement and resolution of the following points, among the wide range of grounded theorists, will be achieved any time soon. Nevertheless these are some issues of which any grounded theorist should be aware.

2.4.4.1 Glaser versus Strauss

Since its inception in 1967, the two founding scholars of grounded theory have taken divergent perspectives of grounded theory. The height of the disagreement took the form of Glaser's publication, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence versus Forcing* (1992), which was a book-long critique of Strauss and Corbin's *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (1990). Glaser concludes that Strauss and Corbin's (1990) technique is not grounded theory but should instead be called 'Full Conceptual Description' (Glaser 1992 p. 124). The disagreement between the two types of grounded theory since then, is acknowledged widely by grounded theorists (Babchuk 1996; Benoliel 1996; Charmaz 2000; Dey 1999; Glaser 1992; Goulding 1999a; Rennie 1998a; Shankar and Goulding 2001).

The main difference between the Glaser's and Strauss's approaches to grounded theory is that Glaser focuses more on theoretical sensitivity, and allowing the theory to emerge from data. In contrast, Strauss, perhaps in an attempt to explain the grounded theory process, has incorporated a highly systematic/dogmatic method of coding (Charmaz 2000; Goulding 1999a; Goulding 2002; Rennie 1998a).

Generalisability of the emergent theory to situations beyond the current context also differs. At first glance, Strauss and Corbin's (1998) version of grounded theory is more in line with positivism in the sense that a good theory should indeed be verifiable, reproducible, and generalisable to a wider context. In contrast, when applying Glaser's more flexible form of emergent theory, the researcher's job is to generate theories not to verify them (Glaser 1992). Thus, findings are only applicable to the immediate area of investigation and, as such, researchers are cautioned not to apply findings to areas different from the initial context of investigation (Babchuk 1996; Goulding 2002).

It has been suggested that many of the problems that have plagued grounded theory are due to the failing of its major players to address the epistemological backgrounds in which grounded theory is set (Annells 1996; Charmaz 1990; Rennie 1998a). The next section which continues to discuss some of these issues may shed some light on why the founding fathers of grounded theory were destined to go their separate ways.

2.4.4.2 Constructivist versus objectivist grounded theory

On the surface, grounded theory is an inductive methodology that appears to fit most comfortably under an interpretivist theoretical perspective (Corbin 1998; Crotty 1998; Goulding 1998). Indeed, Strauss and Corbin state that “building theory, by its very nature, implies interpreting data” (1990 p. 22). With this interpretivist approach in mind, it could be argued that grounded theorists should be more concerned with *understanding* a phenomenon rather than the need to be able to explain, predict, and control it (Charmaz 2000; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Rennie 1998a; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). However, the original goal of grounded theory *was* to arrive at a theory to *predict* and *explain* phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This aim appears to be at odds with the interpretivist perspective on which grounded theory rests (Rennie 1998b).

Upon closer inspection of the extant literature, it is apparent that the definition of grounded theory has shifted from a system of ‘discovering’ theory from data (Glaser and Strauss 1967), to a system of ‘generating’ theory from data (Glaser 1978), to a theory ‘derived’ from data (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Although paying such attention to the change in jargon appears pedantic, the assumption that theory is waiting to be discovered from data is very different, epistemologically, from suggesting that theory may be generated, derived, or developed from data. If theory is discovered from the data, this implies that the theory has always been there and the role of the researcher is to discover it in its purest sense. This perspective would suggest that grounded theory is traditionally a positivistic methodology. On the other hand, suggesting that theory can be derived or generated from the data implies some level of construction and interpretation between researcher and data. This viewpoint would suggest that grounded theory is inherently interpretive.

Charmaz (1990; 2000) discusses the topic of constructivist and objectivist versions of grounded theory. Allowing theory to ‘emerge’ by itself from data suggests that there is some underlying theory that exists separate from the researcher. This view of theory and reality as being separate from the observer is more in line with positivism, which brings with it some very different assumptions than interpretivism and constructivism. Glaser (2002) believed that objective truth/reality lay in the data and that by following his version of grounded theory it would emerge by itself. The researcher remaining neutral and being careful not to force the data, could discover what was always there (Glaser 2002). Thus, Glaser’s approach to grounded theory

was actually more in line with positivism (Charmaz 1990; Charmaz 2000). Paradoxically, his approach to arriving at this truth emphasised the ethereal role of emergence and theoretical sensitivity to nuances in the data (Goulding 1999a; Goulding 2002).

On the other hand, Strauss's method acknowledges that grounded theory does involve some level of interpretation on the researcher's part (Corbin 1998; Rennie 1998a). As such, a post-positivist approach to research was taken. The belief was that truth existed in the data, but the researcher may not be able to comprehend it objectively. Some theorists have placed Strauss and Corbin's method of grounded theory nearer the relativist end of the ontological continuum (Annells 1996). In any case, the irony is that Strauss and Corbin's 'softer' assumption of reality has been overruled by a distinctively rigorous set of procedures which were implemented to increase reproducibility and verifiability, thus, also leading to a theory grounded in 'reality' (Charmaz 2000).

As a solution to this dilemma, Charmaz (1990) proposed another approach to grounded theory, which she termed 'constructivist grounded theory' (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz 2000). At the procedural level, Charmaz envisions the use of grounded theory methods as being "flexible, heuristic strategies rather than as formulaic procedures" (Charmaz 2000 p. 510). This appears to be in line with Glaser and Strauss's original conception of grounded theory as a general inductive method, a method that may be used with any sort of data whether it be qualitative or quantitative (Glaser 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1967). However, where constructivist grounded theory differs with Glaser's and Strauss's versions of grounded theory, is in its epistemological and ontological assumptions. First, Charmaz assumes that multiple social realities exist (relativism). Second, similar to Corbin (1998), Charmaz recognises the interactive nature of interviews and analysis, and accepts that the researcher will inevitably become a participator in the research process. It logically follows that the true meaning of the subject's experience must be interpreted by the researcher (interpretivism). Third, unlike the former proponents who aim to 'discover' or 'generate' a grounded theory based in reality, Charmaz's grounded theory is formed through an interpretation of a 'constructed' reality (constructivism and social constructionism). The aim of constructivist grounded theory is to understand the meaning of a phenomenon, rather than attain the truth (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz 2000). In this sense, it may appear to be quite different to Glaser's (1992; 1978) and Strauss and Corbins' (1990; 1998) versions; however, the creation of a theory, albeit one that offers understanding of a phenomenon rather than control over it, is still of

primary concern. Thus, owing to the similar epistemological and ontology assumptions (see Figure 2 page 38), Charmaz's version of grounded theory is deemed the most suitable for this thesis.

2.4.5 Core principles of grounded theory

Neither the founding authors of grounded theory nor current practitioners have been able to agree on what grounded theory should or should not be. Therefore, what is important, in terms of research, is the realisation that grounded theory is, first and foremost, a methodology (Glaser 2005). Specifically, grounded theory is an inductive methodology that may be used under any research paradigm, with any type of data, to help increase understanding of a phenomenon. One of the reasons for grounded theory's success is because it provided scholars with some core principles, for conducting inductive research, at a time when instructions were scarce. The core principles that contributed to the initial attraction of grounded theory are: emergence, theoretical sensitivity, theoretical sampling, constant comparison, and memo writing. To date, those core principals still remain valuable in current academic research.

2.4.5.1 Emergence

The strength of grounded theory, as a methodology, is the fit between the theory and the data from which the theory was derived. One method of ensuring closeness to the data is a process termed 'emergence'. Glaser placed a particular emphasis on the importance of this concept; he proposed that only by allowing emergence to occur could a true grounded theory be generated. Concepts must emerge out of the data and not be forced into pre-determined categories and the subsequent theory must also be allowed to emerge from the data and not influenced by pre-conceived hypotheses. Note the focus on induction here. The fuzzy nature of emergence is the main area of dispute between Glaser's and Strauss's schools of grounded theory. The former emphasises allowing emergence to occur without actually defining what it is, while the later attempts to do so by prescribing a strict system of procedures, resulting in what some grounded theorists, especially the Glaser school, liken to 'forcing' of data.

One highly effective method of allowing emergence to occur, or at the very least becoming aware of when the researcher might be 'forcing' data, is the concept of theoretical sensitivity.

2.4.5.2 Theoretical sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is a fundamental aspect of grounded theory. Defined as “a personal quality of the researcher” (Strauss and Corbin 1990 p. 41-42), it is an attribute which consists of professional, personal, and academic experience; as well as the researcher’s personality, temperament, and level of theoretical insight into the area of interest (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). It allows a grounded theorist to develop a ‘good’ grounded theory more efficiently than a researcher who does not possess the same level of theoretical sensitivity. It also allows the researcher to be aware of important concepts when mentioned in interviews or as they emerge during analysis. Theoretical sensitivity prevents the researcher from forcing the data and keeps him or her aware of potential biases. Apart from the use of technical literature, mentioned earlier, theoretical sensitivity can also be increased during analysis as the researcher becomes more familiar and skilled at working with and asking questions of the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). In relation to hermeneutics, it becomes obvious that ‘pre-understanding’ is a concept that contributes directly to the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity.

2.4.5.3 Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling is a useful method of sourcing data that grounded theory methodology has contributed to interpretive research. Defined as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges” (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p. 45), theoretical sampling is sampling that is directed by the emerging theory. A more detailed account of theoretical sampling and the sampling procedure conducted in this thesis is described in section 2.6.1 Recruiting the participants.

2.4.5.4 Constant comparison

Grounded theory was revolutionary for its time. Before Glaser and Strauss’s book *Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), qualitative methodologies were not explicitly taught (Charmaz 2000). One very useful contribution of grounded theory was that it provided a systematic set of procedures for researchers to follow in the treatment of qualitative data.

Constant comparison is the procedure of comparing incidents within and among individuals for similarities and differences in order to create categories. Categories are then compared to each other to reveal emerging relationships. All the while, the

grounded theorist compares new incidences to existing categories to ensure that categories still fit the data from which they came. As constant comparison continues, a theory eventually emerges from the relationships that exist between categories.

In traditional grounded theory, delimitation/reduction then occurs; whereby one core category is selected by comparing categories that all converge onto a main variable (Goulding 2001). That core category goes on to become the main purpose of the grounded theory and should be constantly compared with other categories. Incidences and categories that add to the core category are retained, while those that do not contribute to theory development are discarded or left for another study (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Since the inception of constant comparison, the terminology of 'coding' has undergone many variations. Glaser (1992; 1978) drew the distinction between two types of codes that exist in grounded theory. Substantive codes are those that make up categories due to the similarity of their conceptual meanings and are usually the first codes that emerge during early analysis. Theoretical codes are those that connect the substantive codes together in the form of relationships. Thus, grounded theory not only needs to be able to describe the phenomena with substantive codes, but also generate a theory of how they relate to each other through theoretical coding (Glaser 1992). In his earlier work, Glaser posits that 18 different types of theoretical codes could exist. He suggests that they could be used as ways of looking at the data, allowing the researcher to be open to the many possible relationships that may exist when generating a grounded theory (Glaser 1978). Glaser goes on to suggest that since many concepts have already been discovered and defined, not many concepts could be considered 'new'. Therefore, the true value of grounded theory is in the theoretical codes that emerge and the ability to see the new connections/relationships between concepts (Glaser 1992 p. 29).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) attempted to make the concept of constant comparison more concrete by splitting it up into three steps: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The first phase, open coding, is the process of 'cracking open the data' and involves line by line analysis where points of interest in the data are noted/highlighted. Axial coding then involves connecting the various categories together in the form of potential relationships. It should be noted that axial coding was described as a method of forcing conceptualisations onto the data and deemed unnecessary by Glaser (1992). According to Glaser, if open coding and constant comparison were performed

correctly and 'emergence' allowed to occur naturally, theoretical codes would eventuate without the need for axial coding (1992 p. 61-63). Finally, selective coding consists of grouping categories even further into core categories, which go on to form the foundation of the emergent theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). By contrast, Glaser's (1992 p. 75) version of selective coding focuses on allowing the emergent core variable to guide further data collection or analyses, that is, to code selectively with the core variable in mind. Overall, despite the disagreements regarding the specific elements of data analysis, the fundamental principals of constant comparison still remain in most grounded theory research.

2.4.5.5 Memo writing

During the grounded theory process of coding, memos are written. Memos comprise the researcher's thoughts and insights regarding the emerging codes and how they relate to each other (Glaser 1978; Goulding 2001; Spiggle 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990). They are comments and ideas about the data and how it has been analysed; as such they are kept separate from the data to prevent the researcher from confusing it with actual quotes (Glaser 1978). This separation also allows the researcher to gain 'analytical distance' from the data, enabling the researcher to rise above the data and think about it in more abstract terms (Charmaz 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1990). These ideas might occur during analysis, but may also surface at times other than when the researcher is not coding, for instance, when one is reading an article that is related to an emergent theme. Since memos may be fleeting thoughts that run the risk of disappearing if not acknowledged appropriately, it has been recommended that memos should be written down promptly as they arise (Glaser 1978).

2.5 Summary of Research Strategy

The concepts outlined in the preceding sections and the general position of this study are summarised in Figure 2, which has been developed from a combination of sources (Charmaz 1990; Charmaz 2000; Crotty 1998; Guba and Lincoln 1998; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Murray and Ozanne 1991; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). Logically, the researcher's view of reality, and his or her assumptions about the nature of knowledge, will shape the way in which he or she approaches research, and to some extent, his or her choice of methodology (Crotty 1998). Although, most methods and methodologies may be adapted to suit any ontology, epistemology, and theoretical perspective, certain tools and tactics are more compatible with particular viewpoints

and beliefs; this stream of compatibility is represented by the shaded area in Figure 2.

The positioning of constructivism, interpretivism, and the dotted boxes in Figure 2, represents the blurred boundaries that exist between ontology, epistemology, and theoretical perspective, within the extant literature. For example, Crotty (1998) and Schwandt (2000) classify constructionism as an epistemology, while other academics discuss constructivism and constructionism as theoretical approaches to research (Guba 1990; Guba and Lincoln 1998; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Schwandt 1998); a similar discrepancy occurs when discussing interpretivism (Crotty 1998; Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 1998; Schwandt 2000). Since epistemology refers to the study of ‘knowledge’, and both social constructionism and constructivism involve the construction of knowledge by people, this researcher, like other scholars (Crotty 1998; Schwandt 2000), discusses constructionism and constructivism as epistemological topics.

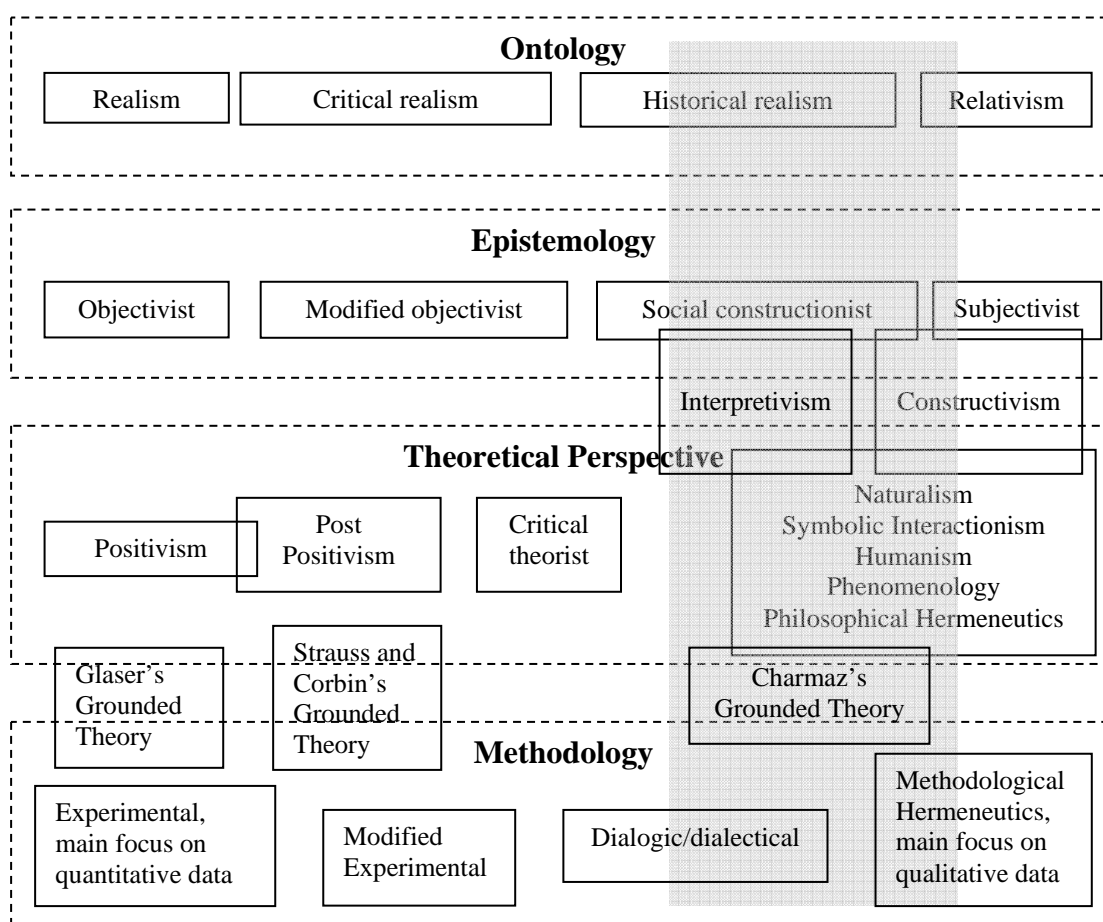


Figure 2. Overview of the philosophical positioning of this thesis (as indicated by the shaded area)

Given that this research is focused on a socially constructed phenomenon, and brands are a form of interactive language best understood within a specific socio/historical context, it is appropriate that a historical realist assumption of reality and a social constructionist view of knowledge are adopted. Since the understanding of why participants might avoid certain brands is, ultimately, a study of the meaning participants attribute to a brand, an interpretivist theoretical perspective is adopted. Specifically, symbolic interactionism and philosophical hermeneutics is adopted in this study of brand avoidance.

Grounded theory is selected as the most appropriate methodology. Not only is grounded theory ideal for the exploration of under-researched areas such as brand avoidance, but its abductive process of analysis also means that it is highly compatible with symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. Furthermore, grounded theory aims to develop theory with which a phenomenon may be better understood, thereby making it a useful tool in answering our research question, why do consumers avoid brands?

Within the various grounded theory approaches (Glaser, Strauss, and Charmaz), there exists a range of assumptions concerning the nature of reality and the relationship between the researcher and their phenomenon. These differences are reflected by positioning of the three main schools within Figure 2. In particular, the figure reinforces the fact that grounded theory is a methodology that may be used with any type of data and under any sort of research paradigm (Glaser 2005). In light of the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical perspective adopted in this thesis, constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz 1990; Charmaz 2000) was judged to be the most compatible methodology. However, despite the conflicting schools of grounded theory, the following core principles remain: allowing the data to drive the research, theoretical sensitivity, memo writing, constant comparison, and the flexible use of data.

2.6 Methods and Procedures

In this section, the specific methods and procedures that were utilised to collect the data will be described. Additionally, the analysis and coding of the information in order to arrive at a comprehensive theory of brand avoidance will be discussed. Finally, the methods for assessing the trustworthiness of the researcher's interpretation will be justified. It should be noted that the procedures outlined below are arranged in a logical sequence for the purposes of clarity. In reality, as espoused

by grounded theory, there was a constant and dynamic interaction between many of the procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

2.6.1 Recruiting the participants

In the current study, participants are used as a source of data for the development of theory, rather than an attempt to represent the wider consumer population. Thus, unlike positivist research, participants are selected on the basis of their ability to contribute insight into the area of brand avoidance rather than their statistical representativeness (Esterberg 2002; McCracken 1988). Consequently, the number of in-depth interviews conducted is dictated by the number of relevant themes that emerge during the course of the investigation. In general, data collection is conducted until saturation point, where the themes begin to repeat reliably (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

The recruitment process of this research utilised some concepts from theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Theoretical sampling is the use of “precise information to shed light on the emerging theory” (Charmaz 2000 p. 519) and should not be confused with purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a broad category of sampling which most qualitative sampling procedures fall under. Simply put, purposive sampling is sampling with a purpose in mind (Coyne 1997). Most researchers will have a predetermined purpose in mind as to why they carried out a certain sampling procedure. The purpose could be to obtain a random sample for statistical representativeness. Thus, one could argue that ALL sampling is purposive, even some aspects of quantitative sampling. It could also be suggested that while purposive sampling may not always be theoretical, theoretical sampling is always purposive, since the purpose of theoretical sampling is to allow the emerging codes and categories to guide the sampling procedure (Coyne 1997).

In theoretical sampling, the researcher should not have a preconceived notion of what type of participants they should be recruiting until they begin to analyse and code the data. Furthermore, the researcher need not have a predetermined sample size since there is no way of predicting when the different categories of the theory will reach saturation point. Therefore the essence of theoretical sampling is simply to allow the emerging theory to drive the sampling (Glaser 1992; Glaser 1978).

Data gathering begins in a very general arrangement and usually involves the selection of participants who might “maximise the possibility of obtaining data” (Coyne 1997 p. 625). As categories and concepts emerge through coding, sampling

then becomes more selective to include sources of information that contribute the most to theory development (Glaser 1978). Furthermore, according to grounded theory, theoretical sampling also considers non-interview information to be acceptable data, such as existing literature, documents, observations, letters, emails, and field reports (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

2.6.1.1 Sensitisation interviews

Initially, three consumers were interviewed to sensitise the researcher to the area of investigation. As espoused by the concepts of theoretical sampling and theoretical sensitivity, the findings that emerged from the analysis of these interviews guided further data gathering.

The first three interviews proved invaluable. They were used for practical purposes such as refining the researcher's interviewing skills, estimating the length of interviews, and development/modification of the interview guide. In addition, they revealed potential technical problems that could occur during the interview; for instance, at what point the tape recorder tends to cut out and also which questions could be restructured in a more understandable format. However, the most important contribution of these initial interviews was their ability to increase the researcher's theoretical sensitivity. Even at this early stage of research, some important themes were already beginning to emerge; thus, the sensitisation interviews highlighted certain concepts that the researcher should keep in mind and areas where further probing might prove fruitful in future interviews.

All three sensitisation interviewees held brand avoidance behaviours and attitudes. This preliminary finding has some important implications with regards to the main source of informants chosen for the remainder of this research, and will be discussed at the end of this section. However, a very brief summary of the three sensitisation interviews is now presented.

During the very first sensitisation interview, the participant said that she "Hated *Starbucks*, because they make S**T coffee". In other words, she avoided the brand because the product offering, coffee, did not taste nice. She also avoided *Starbucks* "because of the whole multinational thing". Similarly, she avoided *Nike* owing to ethical issues regarding sweatshops, but also because she did not like the "look" of the shoes. Therefore it emerged from this first sensitisation interview that the same brands can be avoided for different reasons, even within the same individual. Other incidents of negative product (*McDonald's*) and service experiences (*Cathay Pacific*)

also motivated her brand avoidance. This interviewee then brought up the topic of genetic modification and said that she avoided *Nestle* and other brands that, according to the *Greenpeace* website, use genetically modified organisms. Brand avoidance motivated by values, such as the rejection of *Lion Red* beer for its misogynistic advertising, also emerged during that first sensitisation interview.

The second sensitisation interviewee also avoided brands because of negative product and service experiences. Other reasons for brand avoidance, such as unappealing brand associations and symbolic incongruity, also emerged during this interview. For example, the interviewee stated that she “hates” *ANZ* bank owing to its “shocking service”, and she avoids *Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC)* due to distasteful urban legends involving “cysts on chickens” and because of the greasiness of the food. Of particular interest was this participant’s avoidance of *Skecher’s* (a shoe brand) and *PUMP* (branded water) because she saw the advertising as being “too deliberate and trying too hard to be cool”. Furthermore, the participant suggested that the type of people that the *Skecher’s* ads seemed to be targeting were not the type of people with whom she could “relate”.

The third sensitisation interviewee avoided the *Auckland University of Technology (AUT)* a brand of tertiary education because of a particularly negative service experience with a photography short course. The course was run by a tutor who was often late and very difficult to contact. However, the critical incident that contributed most to the interviewee’s brand avoidance, involved the administration of a colour assignment. The tutor had provided the film for everyone to complete the assignment. Unfortunately, it was only after the colour assignment had been completed, that students realised the tutor had accidentally handed out black and white film. In spite of a refund, this participant vowed never to enrol in another short course with that institution again, unless that specific tutor was dismissed. This interviewee also avoided *Rodney Wayne’s* (a mainstream hairdressing brand), because of a lack of continuity during the service delivery. She felt as though she was being “bundled” from person to person. Additionally, she explicitly avoided the brand *Suzuki* owing to word of mouth regarding the cars’ lack of safety; in particular, the cars were likened to “tin buckets”.

The sensitisation interviews demonstrated that brand avoidance was experienced by all three ‘typical consumers’. Therefore, it can be concluded that most people may also provide rich information regarding their own individual brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours. It should be noted that this is not a statement about the

generalisability of the brand avoidance phenomenon. The researcher is not suggesting that all consumers must have the same reasons for brand avoidance. Instead, this researcher merely proposes that most consumers, based on their individual life experiences, may have something useful to share with regards to brand avoidance. This discovery substantially affected the way in which the main group of informants was recruited, as explained in the following section.

2.6.1.2 Main group of informants

Since the sensitisation interviews suggested that even 'normal' consumers may have some personal thoughts to share about the phenomenon of brand avoidance, this meant that recruitment of the main group of informants would not need to be as selective nor restricted as first thought. In other words, it was not necessary to recruit homogenous groups of consumer activists, voluntary simplifiers, or eco-feminists as previous studies on anti-consumption have done in the past (Craig-Lees and Hill 2002; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson et al. 2006). Consequently, the main population of participants recruited for this study comprised 'ordinary' consumers. The recruitment of 'ordinary' consumers also differentiates this thesis from the majority of studies in consumer resistance, which tend to favour participants recruited from the fringes of society (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004).

Participants were self-selected as they responded to printed advertisements (Appendix 4 page 267) posted around The University of Auckland's main campus, located in the central city. The advertisement informally asked if the potential informant "bought stuff", stated that the researcher was interested in the opinions and behaviours of 'everyday' consumers, and offered a \$20 voucher as an incentive for participation. The advertisement did not stipulate that one had to be a student to participate and, as explained earlier, nor did it ask for consumer activists; but obviously, none of these people were precluded from participating, if they wanted to respond to the advertisement. Snowball sampling was also incorporated into the recruitment process. In those cases, existing participants were asked to refer acquaintances to the researcher, who might have encountered similar brand avoidance experiences.

These methods of recruiting informants were justified, since the research required 'active' consumers who also possessed a fairly good awareness of the range of brands available on the market. The assumption that participants recruited in this way would be familiar with brands was confirmed when the researcher asked each

participant, at the beginning of each interview, to convey suitable examples of typical brands and none experienced difficulty. Furthermore, given that this study of brand avoidance was interested in the situations where consumers actively chose to reject a brand, it was also necessary to identify individuals who had financial control over their own purchasing decisions. In other words, purchasing power was essential in order for the researcher to investigate active avoidance of brands rather than the non-selection of brands caused by a lack of financial resources.

Finally, apart from satisfying academic interests, the consistency in location of the sample population and predictability of foot traffic facilitated the recruitment process. Although the previous statement may give the impression that the participants were all obtained from a convenience sample, it should be noted that, despite the sampling indeed being 'convenient', the researcher was still able to adhere to the philosophy of theoretical sampling. In reality, it could be argued that any participant who agrees to participate in research is self-selected in some way and is therefore, 'convenient'. However, this detail does not mean that a convenient sample cannot also be used in a theoretical sense. The essence of theoretical sampling is the use of "information to shed light on the emerging theory" (Charmaz 2000 p. 519). Thus, even though some participants were certainly convenient to recruit, they were interviewed in a very similar way to other people who might have been theoretically sampled. In other words, each interview was built upon the foundation of the last, and pertinent theoretical issues discovered in previous interviews could be addressed in subsequent interviews. Since some form of brand avoidance was experienced by all of the participants, this method of 'convenient theoretical sampling' was not deemed problematic. Thus, the recruitment method of this thesis was both convenient and theoretical.

An observation of the people who comprised the sample revealed a larger than expected number of other occupations. Thus, despite the recruitment location, of the 23 participants interviewed, 12 were not University students (Table 1 summarises the demographic details of the participants). Nonetheless, the size of the sample, as well as the relationship and proximity that participants had with the University, does mean that this research will have limitations. These limitations will be discussed in the final chapter.

Finally, it has been suggested that imbursements may 'corrupt' the interaction between researcher and participant (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). However, with regards to this study it was deemed appropriate to reimburse the interviewees for

their time, since participation is often difficult to attain without some form of compensation. This obstacle to participation is especially true if the research is considered lengthy and if informants have occupations that require special arrangements regarding time and travel. Thus, a \$20 gift voucher for either books or movies was used to help encourage involvement. Equating to approximately \$10 per hour, the amount was not considered so high that it would result in participation purely for money, which could jeopardise the integrity and accuracy of the research; instead the vouchers were offered as a sign of the researcher's appreciation.

Interview	Gender and Age	Ethnic group	Qualification	Work	Income	Living circumstance
Sensitisation Int 1 CI	Female, 27	European	Post Grad	Student	15,001-20,000	With partner
Sensitisation Int 2 TS	Female, 22	NZ	Tertiary	Student	15,001-20,000	With partner
Sensitisation Int 3 KH	Female, 28	NZ	Post Grad	Business	40,001-50,000	With unrelated people
Int1 LB	Female, 52	European	Post Grad	Student	15,001-20,000	Single dwelling
Int2 SR	Female, 45	NZ	Tertiary	Admin	30,001-40,000	With unrelated people
Int3 JJ	Female, 25	European	Doctorate	Academic	5001-10,000	With unrelated people
Int4 AR	Male, 29	European	Tertiary	Business	50,001-70,000	With partner
Int5 MS	Female, 46	NZ	Secondary	Student	40,001-50,000	Other
Int6 KD	Female, 17	NZ	Secondary	Student	1-5000	With immediate family
Int7 CK	Female, 25	Asian	Post Grad	Student	30,001-40,000	With immediate family
Int8 VC	Female, 19	Asian	Tertiary	Student	1-5000	With immediate family
Int9 AP	Male, 30	NZ	Tertiary	Technical	70,001-100,000	With unrelated people
Int10 KB	Female, 27	NZ	Doctorate	Student	10,001-15,000	With unrelated people
Int11 KL	Male, 20	Asian	Secondary	Student	1-5000	With immediate family
Int12 RH	Male, 26	Other	Post Grad	Business	30,001-40,000	With immediate family
Int13 JH	Male, 29	NZ	Tertiary	Recreation	20,001-25,000	With immediate family
Int14 VL	Female, 28	Asian	Doctorate	Academic	50,001-70,000	With partner
Int15 DS	Male, 30	European	Doctorate	Student	15,001-20,000	With unrelated people
Int16 MT	Male, 42	Maori	Post Grad	Academic	40,001-50,000	Partner and children
Int17 SW	Male, 24	NZ	Post Grad	Technical	30,001-40,000	With immediate family
Int18 SP	Male, 23	Asian	Tertiary	Recreation	25,001-30,000	With unrelated people
Int19 MO	Female, 31	Polynesian	Post Grad	Academic	40,001-50,000	With immediate family
Int20 JL	Male, 26	Asian	Tertiary	Student	1-5000	With immediate family

Table 1 Participant details

2.6.2 In-depth interviews

Owing to the under-researched nature of brand avoidance, the main contribution of this thesis is to provide a comprehensive understanding of why people choose to reject brands. Qualitative data was sought since it permits a less focused but broader understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative data is also more suitable in situations where the research question is likely to invoke an ambiguous answer, or when respondents may find it difficult to answer a question succinctly. Lastly, qualitative data is best suited in studies where the objective is to gain insight into the complicated nature of a cultural phenomenon, from the respondent's perspective; rather than representing the generalisability of that phenomenon within the wider world. In other words, qualitative data is necessary when the researcher wants to understand how participants see, experience, and construe certain aspects of their world (McCracken 1988). To this end, in-depth interviews were deemed an appropriate method of collecting qualitative data.

The terms semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews are often used interchangeably (Esterberg 2002); thus, the term 'in-depth interview' will be used in this study hereafter. The 'long interview' is another similar method that occupies the space between fully structured interviews/surveys and the more lengthy unstructured interviews, such as, ethnographic, participant observer, and psychological depth interviews (McCracken 1988).

In-depth interviews are particularly useful when the researcher aims to explore a phenomenon in greater depth, by gathering rich data, and when theory generation is a primary objective (Esterberg 2002; Rao and Perry 2003; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). McCracken suggests that in-depth/long interviews may be one of the most powerful methods of acquiring qualitative data, without the need for prolonged contact or unobtrusive observation; therefore, it is also an extremely efficient method (1988). When compared to fully structured interviews or verbal surveys, the more flexible design of an in-depth interview allows the participant to express his or her ideas more freely, resulting in richer data (Esterberg 2002; Rao and Perry 2003; Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

When compared to other 'looser' techniques, the way in which in-depth interviews are organised ensures that all important questions are examined (Esterberg 2002; Rao and Perry 2003; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Consequently, the resulting information from an in-depth interview is often 'streamlined' and easier to manage

than similar discourse derived through free flowing unstructured interviews, such as ethnographic, participant observation, and depth interviews (McCracken 1988).

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), in-depth interviews are deemed most suitable when:

- 1) The researcher has a relatively clear and well-defined area of interest.
- 2) Time constraints are present.
- 3) The researcher wishes to understand the phenomenon among a broad range of people and settings.
- 4) The setting in which the phenomenon takes place is not easily accessible.

All four conditions applied to this thesis. One, the focus was on brand avoidance phenomenon only. Two, there were definite time constraints. Three, while not to be confused with external validity, a grounded theory was being generated to provide an understanding of brand avoidance beyond a single occurrence. Four, although the setting where brand avoidance occurs was accessible, that is, shopping malls stores and retail outlets, time constraints prevented the researcher from making onsite observations for each individual participant. More importantly, the purpose of this study was to go beyond observation of behaviour. The researcher aimed to uncover the reasons for brand avoidance attitudes and behaviour. Thus, even though the setting in which brand avoidance took place was physically accessible, the ability to discover why brand avoidance occurred was lessened within a naturalistic setting. Instead, a secure and relaxed environment whereby participants could disclose and discuss the underlying reasons for their attitudes and behaviours was preferred. Furthermore, it has been claimed that most acts of anti-consumption are inherently difficult to detect by methods such as observation, since there is no act of consumption to observe (Wilk 1997a; Wilk 1994). Hence, asking participants about the brands that they avoid is considered to be the most straightforward approach to learning about the brand avoidance phenomenon. Thus, although the setting where brand avoidance occurs was accessible, conducting research on site was deemed impractical and not crucial for fulfilling the purposes of this study.

Overall, in-depth interviews are a highly effective method of gaining insight into conscious human acts, such as brand avoidance. A study of brand avoidance will require an understanding of what a certain brand means to an individual. Such a study will also be interested in the construction or re-construction of brand-meaning.

In-depth interviews allow the researcher explicit access to the introspective thought processes of the participants. As McCracken (1988) suggests, in-depth/long interviews permit the researcher to see and experience the world as the participants do, and to understand the way in which they make sense of the world. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to gain an understanding of brand avoidance from the participants' perspective, but do not claim to ignore the interviewer's role in this constructive process. In-depth interviews help to answer the research questions put forward in this study and also result in rich qualitative data which is useful for the generation of theory. Thus, in-depth interviews were the method deemed most appropriate for fulfilling the objectives of this study.

2.6.2.1 Interviewing style and rapport

In agreement with traditional in-depth interview design, a guide (see Table 2 page 51) was developed in accordance with the main research questions and the experience gained from the sensitisation interviews. Generally, this guide assisted in keeping the interview, and the subsequent qualitative data, focused, structured, and organised, and ensured that all relevant research questions were addressed (Esterberg 2002; McCracken 1988; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). An interview guide also provided a setting or context that gave the participants a better indication of the types of experiences they should share with the researcher (McCracken 1988). However, it was important that the guide did not restrict the variability that exists in an interview or stifle the participant's ability to speak freely, should they feel the desire to do so (McCracken 1988). Thus, the guide did not dictate the exact nature of each interview, instead, the main focus of the discussion was on the participants' experiences. Overall, "the interviewee's responses should shape the order and structure of the interview" (Esterberg 2002 p. 87).

Since an in-depth interview is similar to a conversation rather than a straight question and answer session, it was vital that rapport was initially established between the interviewer and participant. Thus, it was important not to rush directly into the research questions (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Obviously the extent of the preliminary rapport building and the pace at which each interview proceeded was dictated by the specific circumstances and interactions that occurred between the researcher and the participant in each interview.

An interview is essentially a relationship between interviewee and interviewer, and will always involve interaction, resulting in socially constructed meaning (Charmaz 2000; Esterberg 2002). However, the main purpose of an interview is still to gain

insight from the participant's point of view. Thus, several steps were taken during the interview to ensure that they felt at ease enough to convey their experiences as accurately as possible. In order to minimise the perceived power distance between researcher and participant, the interviewer dressed casually enough to build rapport, but conservatively enough to remind the respondents that the interview and related questions were of a professional nature (McCracken 1988). Moreover because the topic of conversation was about branding, neutral and unbranded clothing was worn at all interviews to avoid social desirability effects (Esterberg 2002).

Interruption was kept to a minimum and the researcher attempted to remain as non-judgemental, accepting, agreeable, and sensitive as possible (Leech 2002; McCracken 1988; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Furthermore, to minimise interviewer bias, a phenomenon whereby participants may respond in a way they believe the researcher wants them to respond, the interviewer attempted to remain neutral/benign, curious, and unobtrusive throughout the interview (McCracken 1988). For instance, if a participant asked the researcher for his opinion on a topic matter, the researcher would respond by telling the participant that it was his or her thoughts which were of interest and would refrain from disclosing his own opinions and attitudes until after the interview. Additionally, during the initial phase of the interview, it was conveyed to the interviewee that there were no right or wrong answers (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

With regards to grounded theory, and most interview techniques, the strategies outlined above ensured that each participant's recollections or re-constructions of his or her brand experiences were able to emerge naturally from the interviews.

2.6.2.2 Interview process

After general introductions, administrative tasks, and a brief description of the study, an easy to follow definition of a brand was communicated to the participant. This step was necessary to ensure a common understanding of the term 'brand' existed between interviewer and interviewee. Since the focus of this thesis is on brand avoidance rather than people's definition of a brand, this setting of the scene was not deemed to be problematic. Based on the definition of 'brand', given by the researcher, the participant was then asked to list a few examples of brands; none of the interviewees experienced any difficulty with this task.

The interviewees were then asked to list brands which they avoided if finance was not a consideration. Since analysis of the sensitisation interviews indicated that the

recollection of avoided brands may be difficult for some participants, no restrictions were placed on the subject matter. Therefore, discussion of brand avoidance pertaining to a wide range of products, services, and organisations was encouraged. 'Grand tour' prompts (McCracken 1988) such as "Think about the typical purchases you make, go through some of those product categories" were used to encourage respondents to start thinking about the brands with which they were already familiar. It was hoped that by considering their consumption of brands, participants may also bring to mind the brands that they have been avoiding.

Other strategies were also utilised to assist in the recall of avoided brands; these are listed in the interview guide (Table 2) and include prompts such as asking the respondent to imagine walking through a shopping mall, or asking the respondent to 'tell the story' of a critical incident. These 'planned prompts' are suggested to be particularly useful when the subject matter is one that is not normally thought about by participants (McCracken 1988).

The bulk of the interview consisted of the participants being asked to describe the circumstances that had led them to avoid the listed brands, or to explain the reasons behind their avoidance. Closed-ended questions, leading questions, and scientific jargon were avoided (Esterberg 2002; McCracken 1988; Taylor and Bogdan 1998). During the course of each interview, further information was acquired through 'floating prompts' or probing the interviewees to clarify ambiguous meanings and elaborate on relevant themes, key terms, or points of interest (McCracken 1988). Several strategies proved useful in probing for deeper understanding. The participants' statements were frequently quoted back to them before each question in order to ensure that there was shared understanding between interviewer and interviewee. However, the researcher was careful not to alter/bias the content of what was really said by the participant (Leech 2002; McCracken 1988). Participants were always asked for examples to help illustrate their point. Sometimes they would be asked to clarify a complicated statement by way of 'contrasting' between similar categories (McCracken 1988), or by describing the opposite of what they meant. These techniques provided a more concrete setting in which to discuss abstract concepts, such as a person's values. At other times, depending on the personality of the participant and rapport, the researcher would take on an opposing view; in other words, play the role of 'Devil's advocate', in order to explore the deeper levels of thinking in the participant's arguments/opinions.

Research agenda Interviewer statements and questions

Introduction to project	<i>Before we start I want to make it clear that there are no right or wrong answers. That's the whole point of this research; it's never been looked at before. I'm interested in what normal consumers think about brands, and especially about certain brands that they might not like, or brands they might avoid even if they had the money to buy.</i>
Establishing mutual understanding of brand.	<i>Before we start I have to make sure we understand what brands are between the two of us, so we know we are talking about the same thing. By brand I mean a name of a product, service or company that is a form of communication that conveys any number of meanings between people. For example, Coke is a brand; Levi's is a brand. They are names that give you some sort of information about the product. This information may come from the company, or from what you know of the brand, or from other independent parties like your friends or family. So if I said Levis, you would think of a pair of jeans and a couple of associations linked with Levis. If someone in Africa didn't know what Levi's was, then I wouldn't be able to use that brand to communicate with them. So if you could give me some examples of what you understand to be a brand, we can go from there.</i>
What brands are avoided by the consumer?	<i>What brands do you avoid by choice? Are there any brands that you could afford but actively choose not to purchase? Think about the typical purchases you make, go through some of those product categories. Imagine you are walking through a shopping mall or supermarket. What about services or organisations?</i>
What are the reasons that cause people to avoid certain brands?	<i>What are your reasons for avoiding brand X? When did you first start avoiding this brand? What happened? Tell me the story of what happened. Think of the process you go through to make your purchase decisions. What is the process you go through to decide which brands you will purchase? How do you decide which brands you like and which brands you choose to avoid?</i>

Table 2 Interview guide and probes**2.6.2.3 Negative case analysis**

An important aspect of developing any theory is to establish boundaries around what the theory accounts for, when it stops being applicable, or when its ability to explain a phenomenon becomes diminished (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Understanding the conditions in which a phenomenon of interest does not occur, or is restricted, is posited to add strength, variation, and depth to a grounded theory, as it forces the researcher to modify and refine the theory as disconfirmations are encountered (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Paying attention to these negative cases also ensures that any biases towards analysing data in favour of an emergent theory are kept in

check, thereby adding credibility to the interpretative inquiry (Spiggle 1994; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Negative case analysis, or refutation (Spiggle 1994), requires the researcher to adopt a certain level of scepticism towards the research. Practically, it is achieved by scrutinising and testing emergent themes with data.

In this thesis, several steps were taken to investigate the circumstance in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated. First, the constant comparison method of coding (discussed during the coding section) requires that emerging themes are constantly compared to new data; this ensures that the themes remain relevant in the presence of other evidence. Thus, in this thesis, emergent themes are constantly subjected to the refutation process. Second, participants were asked two questions near the end of each interview to “locate negative evidence” (Spiggle 1994 p. 497). The probes were used to elicit discussion of the conditions that would prevent or stop brand avoidance and are displayed in Table 3. In general, two broad lines of question were initiated.

1. When was the last time you used the brands we have been discussing?

This line of questioning was posed to encourage discussion of past circumstances that prevented or stopped a consumer from carrying out behavioural brand avoidance, despite the informant having indicated a desire to avoid those brands during the interview.

2. What would it take for you to repurchase the brands that you are currently avoiding?

Although it seems logical to assume that a mere reversal of the ‘reasons for avoidance’ would result in the repurchase of an avoided brand, since the boundaries of brand avoidance is an under researched area, that assumption was not taken for granted. Hence, this second line of questioning was followed so that the researcher could gain an explicit understanding of when brand avoidance would stop.

The researcher expected that the responses to the two lines of questioning may overlap to some extent. Thus, although the guide below makes a distinction between the circumstances that prevent brand avoidance in the past, and the conditions that may halt brand avoidance in the future; in reality, both lines of questioning work synergistically to help shed light on the circumstances in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated.

Research agenda	Interviewer statements and questions
What has prevented or stopped brand avoidance from occurring in the past?	<p><i>These brands we've been discussing, when was the last time you used them?</i></p> <p><i>What was your reason for selecting the brand?</i></p>
What conditions would stop brand avoidance in the future?	<p><i>In terms of the brands you avoid, how do these attitudes affect your future behaviour?</i></p> <p><i>What would it take to change your attitude?</i></p> <p><i>What would it take for you to repurchase the brands that you are currently avoiding?</i></p> <p><i>What would it take for a brand to redeem itself?</i></p>

Table 3 Probes used to elicit negative case data

2.6.2.4 Closing the interview

The entire process lasted one and a half to two hours per participant. At the end of each interview, the main points made by the interviewee were summarised and reflected back to them for the purposes of clarification. A question was asked to ensure that the informants had a final opportunity to talk about other aspects of brand avoidance, which might have been missed by the researcher. The participants were then asked to comment on the process of the interview, and what it was like for them to talk about brand avoidance. Most felt that the interview was interesting and enlightening for them, as brand avoidance was seldom a topic they discussed. Furthermore, asking the participant to reflect back on the process also provided helpful feedback to the researcher in terms of helping to develop the coherence and structure of subsequent interviews. A quick demographics questionnaire was administered at the end of the dialogue for comparison and identification purposes (Appendix 6).

Finally, the atypical nature of talking about the brands that people avoid, rather than what they normally purchase, means that some participants found it difficult to recall every brand avoidance incident within one interview. Thus, some experiences might not be easily recalled; so, at the conclusion of each interview, participants were given the researcher's contact details. Participants were asked to email or ring the researcher in the event that they remembered more details about their brand avoidance experiences after the session. In line with grounded theory, these documents could be included in coding. However, no further communication was received from any of the participants.

Table 4, displays the closing process for each interview.

Research agenda	Interviewer statements and questions
Other factors- Ensure that we have had the opportunity to cover everything.	<i>Are there any other factors you can think of that may cause you to avoid certain brands, which have not been covered thus far?</i>
Summarise interview, give demographics questionnaire, and provide contact information for future questions, feedback, or additional insights.	<i>We've covered just about everything; is there anything else you would like to add?</i> <i>I was just wondering how this process has been for you, coming in to talk about brand avoidance.</i> <i>Are there any questions?</i> <i>If you think of anything else later on, that you think might be useful with regards to my study; anything that we forgot to discuss or could not think of at the time, please feel free to drop me an email or phone me. Here are my details.</i>

Table 4 End of interview procedure

2.6.3 Data management and analysis

Though not essential to grounded theory, or any other qualitative methodology, each interview was recorded on audio cassette tapes. The advantages of audio recording each interview outweigh the disadvantages. The main disadvantage of taping may be the participants' awareness of being recorded. The realisation that thoughts and opinions are being recorded verbatim can lead to self-consciousness, which can reduce the amount of disclosure, or create a barrier to building rapport. Additionally, impression management may be increased resulting in participants saying what they believe is socially desirable. However, it could be argued that since interviewees already know that what they say will be analysed deeply, the presence of a tape recorder should not make them anymore more self-conscious (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Furthermore, the majority of these disadvantages may be reduced by ensuring confidentiality, and in most cases participants soon become acclimatised to the presence of the recording device (Esterberg 2002; Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

In terms of advantages, taping an interview removes the pressure of note taking from the researcher, thus, allowing him or her to listen more intently (McCracken 1988). Taping also provides a verbatim record of the data for others to confirm the trustworthiness of the coding and interpretation. With regards to grounded theory, this ensures that the theory generated can be traced back to the data. Tapes are also more accurate than relying on memory alone, thereby providing the researcher with

better transcripts with which he or she may code. For example, to ensure transcription was accurate in this thesis, after each interview was transcribed the researcher read through the text while listening to the audio tape from which the transcription was derived. Tapes also allow future researchers to work with the data from a different viewpoint, giving the option to focus on different extracts than those chosen by the original interviewer (Silverman 2000). Finally, tapes also allow certain aspects of the discourse to be revealed that text alone may not necessarily capture, such as sarcasm or tone (Esterberg 2002). Being able to relive the conversation is especially important if the participant appears, in text, to have said something counterintuitive or contradictory to their line of thinking.

All 23 in-depth interviews were transcribed into 423 single spaced pages, to be coded and analysed using the grounded theory method of constant comparison. The qualitative software package N6 was used to assist in analysis. N6 is one of the more established qualitative analysis programmes and has been explicitly designed to complement many grounded theory approaches (Charmaz 2000; Ryan and Bernard 2000). Nevertheless, the human researcher cannot be replaced by software when it comes to theory building. Thus, for this research, coding was conducted by the researcher, whilst N6 functioned predominantly as a tool, assisting with the organisation and storage of large sets of interview data, increasing the speed of coding and theory building, and making the re-coding procedure more efficient (Weitzman 2000).

2.6.3.1 Coding

Most research utilising interviews invariably result in an abundance of qualitative data (McCracken 1988), and raises the dilemma of what to code. In this thesis, though many themes could have emerged from the qualitative data during coding, the main emphasis was on the themes that were related to brand avoidance. Opinions or quotes that were not directly relevant to brand avoidance were disregarded. Therefore, although all data were initially scrutinised, if it became apparent that certain data did not contribute to the understanding of brand avoidance, an analytic decision was made to ignore the irrelevant data. Consequently, only content that helped to inform brand avoidance was considered. The pursuit of themes pertaining to a phenomenon of interest is exactly what grounded theory analysis, or any other interpretive analysis, demands. For this reason, most work involving qualitative data requires the purposeful search for, or 'emergence' of, similar themes that help to inform, saturate, test, or refute a topic of interest. Overall, this may give the

appearance that the data presented in this thesis are conveniently aligned in opinion. However, this was not the case, not all participants exhibited the same level of intensity regarding brand avoidance behaviours and attitudes. In other words, there was considerable variation among the participants with regards to the intensity and frequency of brand avoidance. However, this was not considered a major problem since the objective of this research is to explore the various reasons for brand avoidance, rather than establishing consensus among the wider consumer population as to the frequency or intensity of brand avoidance.

In reality, coding and analysis of qualitative data follows a flexible and similar route regardless of the specific methodology employed. Most analyses of qualitative data involve a typical “movement from the particular to the general” (McCracken 1988 p. 42), ‘part to whole’, or ‘emic to etic’ (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1996; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1994). According to Spiggle (1994) analysis of qualitative data first involves the breaking down of the data into smaller units. Within the grounded theory method of constant comparison, the idea of ‘open coding’ fulfils a similar purpose by ‘cracking open the data’ and carefully considering each line of text. Practically, this means that for every interview, each line of transcription was read and all points of interest highlighted. This step involves categorising information or identifying ‘chunks of data’ (Spiggle 1994), and for grounded theorists involves the beginnings of substantive codes. At this early stage of analysis, substantive codes were created as frequently as necessary to capture all the possible reasons for avoidance, whether they were idiosyncratic to an individual or more reflective of the group. It should also be mentioned that in interpretivist research, “Codes and concepts do not have to be mutually inclusive or exclusive... the same code and meaning can legitimately belong to, and cut across numerous cases” (Goulding 1998 p. 54). Therefore, some incidents were coded into multiple themes.

The process of constant comparison then progressed by re-reading transcripts, with particular attention being paid to the highlighted units, and grouping similar units of dialog into applicable categories. As new interviews were analysed in the face of emerging concepts, similar incidents could be coded directly into the appropriate substantive codes, or categories. Theoretically, once saturation of a category occurs, similar incidents that arise in future interviews can be disregarded when coding, the reason being that they merely “add bulk to the coded data and nothing to theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p. 111). However, the ease of coding provided by N6 meant that the act of adding incidents into already saturated categories was not time consuming and simply helped to ground the category in extra data.

The abundant number of substantive codes generated at the end of open coding meant the next logical step in constant comparison was to compare the categories for similarities and differences. This process has also been termed 'abstraction and comparison' and entails the collapsing together of data units that share similar features (Spiggle 1994). In the case of grounded theory, axial or theoretical coding involves the investigation of the relationships between categories in an attempt to reduce the amount of variety, to rise above mere description (Goulding 2001), and to move one step closer to a developing a powerful theory of brand avoidance. Thus, in this thesis, categories that were very similar, and therefore could be considered redundant, were subsumed by, or in other terms, collapsed into, higher-order categories.

Analysis then progressed to a higher level of abstraction as theoretical coding, or Strauss and Corbin's 'selective' coding (1990), continued. Once again the emphasis is on abstracting beyond description and the emergent themes are compared to each other and to the more central categories. Spiggle (1994 p.495) refers to this process as 'integration', and it requires the mapping of relationships between conceptual elements to arrive at a coherent conceptual framework. There are a plethora of relationship labels that may be applied to emerging categories/themes; for instance, relationships may be circular, causal, or hierarchical (Spiggle 1994). Glaser provided 18 types of theoretical codes that are designed to help researchers think about the connections between themes (1978). However, the main emphasis of grounded theory is not on what to call the connections between themes, but on how these relationships increase understanding of a particular phenomenon. The conceptual framework for this thesis is displayed in Table 13 (page 78), which classifies the various types of brand avoidance into several hierarchical relationships. Additionally, the relationships between the central themes are illustrated in the emergent theory of brand avoidance (Figure 3, page 211).

Throughout the coding process, the researcher was cautious not to force codes into categories that were not really applicable and was careful to keep categories that had dissimilar themes separate. In other words, the researcher attempted to maintain a balance between parsimony and comprehensiveness/variety (Dey 1999; Whetten 1989). All qualitative researchers must decide how much complexity they allow to remain, in order to provide depth and understanding to a topic, while simultaneously deciding on how much complexity they must reduce in order to formulate a theory that is stringent. Some grounded theorists insist on a core category that explains the majority of the phenomenon (Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and

Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998). From there, variables that do not contribute to the core category would be discarded (Glaser 1978). Other grounded theorists have found the emphasis on a single core category somewhat limiting to the depth and complexity of their research (Charmaz 2000; Turner 1983). The problem of extreme parsimony is that research risks becoming one dimensional and simple, rather than multi-dimensional and complex (Dey 1999).

Continually collapsing themes can lead to “muddiness and oversimplification”, while too many themes may confuse the potential audience (Charmaz 2000 p. 526). Therefore, the implication is that at some point the researcher must decide which themes are best absorbed by a greater category and which ones deserve to remain an entity in their own right. During coding, some themes appeared to have a greater influence on brand avoidance than others, and could possibly subsume many other themes. However, given the emergent nature of brand avoidance research, it was decided that the researcher should maintain as much diversity as possible. As such, even concepts that were mentioned by only a few participants were kept separate during coding, so long as the concept appeared to be a salient and plausible contribution to the emerging theory of brand avoidance. Indeed it is stated that when generating theory, “the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases is not crucial. A single case can indicate a general category and a few more may confirm it...” (Glaser and Strauss 1967 p. 30).

2.6.3.2 The iterative process

It should be noted that the process of constant comparison, outlined above, is far from linear. Coding constantly moved back and forth between open coding, axial coding, and selective/theoretical coding. Newly coded incidents were compared with existing categories and incidents in order to assess fit, and categories were constantly compared to new incidents and existing categories in a similar manner. This ‘iterative’ process (Spiggle 1994) for analysing data is neither sequential nor mechanical; instead, the researcher moves freely between data collection and the various stages of data analysis. In this thesis, the sensitisation interviews provided valuable information on who may be eligible/suitable to interview regarding brand avoidance. Each interview was then analysed and directed the way in which subsequent interviews were conducted.

Coding also underwent the iterative process. For instance, constant comparison between early and recent data sometimes indicated that certain themes needed to be re-coded, or refuted (Spiggle 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990), in order to remain true

to the new data. Furthermore, the inferences drawn from the qualitative data were based on considering the whole interview, as well as the whole data set (Spiggle 1994). In other words, the coding process, and the ability to make sense of a participant's experiences, could only be performed after considering his or her whole interview. Similarly, once all the data had been collected, subsequent analysis and sense-making had to take into account the global themes derived from the entire set of interviews.

The grounded theory coding process is abductive; in other words, it is both deductive *and* inductive, as the researcher moves from the data to theory and back. This approach is similar to the hermeneutical circle, where the interpretive researcher makes sense of the data by moving from specific parts of the text to an understanding of the whole interview, to a more generalised comprehension across interviews, up to an abstract theory, and back to data again. Moreover, the 'sense making' process takes place within a "broader field of historically established meanings" (Thompson 1997 p. 442). In other words, understanding of the phenomenon is inevitably influenced by the social, historical, and cultural contexts that both the researcher and participants occupy (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Thus, during the coding process, the researcher inevitably interprets what the participant is saying, based on his own life experiences as a consumer and as a person living in the same culture. As mentioned earlier, this 'pre-understanding' is essential in all forms qualitative data analysis, since it provides the researcher with a context for analysis. Without an awareness of what it means to be a consumer in the current culture, it is impossible to decide which statements are more or less relevant to the topic of interest and, therefore, which incidents should emerge as themes.

Schwandt (1998; 2000) suggests that in hermeneutics there is no objective or verifiable meaning to be discovered; instead all understanding is negotiated during the act of interpretation. Thus, some proponents of hermeneutical methodologies argue that once the data has been converted to text, it is no longer necessary to understand what the original author/informant meant (Arnold and Fischer 1994 p. 61). In other words, the data/text becomes autonomous from the source/author/participant, and much more emphasis is placed on the researcher (and his or her pre-understanding) to make sense of the texts. Scholars who take this approach have been termed 'strong textualists' (Rorty (1982) cited in Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993), which fits in line with a strong constructionist epistemology (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991; Schwandt 2000). It means that the researcher's

understanding of the text becomes more important than the informant's original intention.

In contrast, grounded theory stresses that theories must 'emerge' from the data, and therefore findings must be 'grounded in', or, at least, 'traceable back to' data. In other words, grounded theory methodology places much more emphasis on attempting to understand the informant's life experience. Researchers adhering to the Glaserian style of grounded theory could be described as 'weak textualists' (Booth 1961 cited in Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993), where the intent of the author is preserved as literally as possible and the researcher is careful to hover close to the data.

However, the version of grounded theory adopted in this thesis is in line with a strong social constructionist view of knowledge (Charmaz 2000). Therefore, the researcher acknowledges that any understanding gained is inevitably constructed from an interaction between the informant, the data, the researcher, and society. Furthermore, when the goal of research is to develop a theory that helps to shed light on a phenomenon rather than merely describe the experiences of the participants, it becomes necessary to abstract from the data into a theory (Goulding 2001). In other words, the researcher must elevate his or her level of analysis from emic to etic (Thompson 1996; Thompson et al. 1994). Nevertheless, it was still important for the researcher to ensure that his interpretation of the text was 'reasonably plausible' and traceable back to the data. Thus, in terms of coding, the iterative process involved the testing, refutation, and verification of the emerging conceptual model by four judges, to ensure that the researchers representation of the data was trustworthy (more details of trustworthiness are discussed later in sections 2.6.5.2 and 2.6.5.3).

Overall, during the development of this thesis the interview texts were read numerous times and the emergent categories and themes under went multiple iterations.

2.6.3.3 Memos and existing literature

During analysis, memos were written when required (Glaser 1978; Spiggle 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The researcher viewed memos as a way of thinking/writing out loud about analyses. They were written as new categories emerged, and were modified as categories and concepts were shifted from one part of the theoretical model to another, or as the theory underwent various iterations. Some memos have been refined and incorporated into the body of this thesis and others have been used to define the final categories that emerged (these are viewable in appendices 7-11). One benefit of using N6 was the ability to

instantaneously insert memos as they arose. An added advantage was that the program linked each memo to the relevant codes/categories and logged the time it was modified or added, while simultaneously keeping memos separate from the data.

Grounded theory suggests that existing literature may be used as an additional source of data to validate emergent concepts. In the current study, as categories began to take on a more substantiated form, specific literature was investigated to provide additional support for the existence of the emergent concepts. Similarly, in hermeneutics, 'dialectical tacking' refers to the development of understanding by comparing and contrasting the findings of the present research with existing knowledge (Thompson 1997). Hermeneutics posit that the 'understanding' of a phenomenon is increased, not only when new research corroborates existing theory, but when the new findings challenges, shows the limits of, and/or extends previous understanding.

Thus, in relation to existing knowledge, one of this thesis's main contributions is that it integrates the emergent themes into an original theoretical model. This comprehensive approach to understanding brand avoidance directly addresses the limits of previous knowledge, which has been based on studies focusing only on singular reasons for brand avoidance. Furthermore, not only do the findings of this thesis corroborate previous research, but the researcher has also attempted to make an original contribution to theory by developing a new way in which brand avoidance may be understood. This new insight into brand avoidance, the thesis's core category, is discussed next.

2.6.4 The core category of brand avoidance

In grounded theory, it is suggested that the researcher's task is not to provide a perfect description which is generalisable to the population. Instead, the purpose of grounded theory is to develop a theory which accounts for the majority of relevant behaviour with regards to the phenomenon under investigation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Thus, through the continual process of constant comparison, theoretical reduction, and delimitation, low level themes are subsumed by higher-order themes, and categories are collapsed and grouped together until one core category takes centre stage (Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The core category represents the 'central phenomenon' around which the grounded theory is generated (Glaser 1978). The core category is an abstracted concept that all the other themes can be related to, and encapsulates "what the research is all about" (Strauss and Corbin 1998 p.146).

Based on the above definition, the core category, which this research centres around, is the notion of an 'incompatible promise'. In other words, all of the sub themes, main themes, and types of brand avoidance seemed to converge onto one compelling idea that helps to shed light on the main research question, why do people avoid brands? The compelling idea of this thesis is that brand avoidance is motivated by the negative re-construction of a brand, one that changes the value constellation of a brand within the consumer's mind, so that the brand becomes a sign of an 'incompatible promise'. This concept will be elaborated on in the final discussion chapter (Section 5.1 The Brand as an Incompatible Promise).

However, rather than focusing only on the core category, many themes and sub themes have also been kept in order to provide a complex understanding of brand avoidance and a comprehensive answer to the question, what makes a brand promise incompatible?

Furthermore, although the core concept of an 'incompatible promise' could be abstracted further to arrive at an even more parsimonious explanation of brand avoidance, the reduction of codes into one concept, while very efficient, would detract from the richness that accompanies the understanding of brand avoidance. For instance, it could be argued that 'negative brand meaning' may be the most parsimonious explanation for brand avoidance. Thus, the reason for brand avoidance is because the brand represents 'negative meaning' to the consumer; the implication follows that all a brand manager needs to do is to ensure that their brand meaning does not become negative. Obviously, not only would this be an overly simplistic, and somewhat naive, view of the marketing world, but it is also not a very useful understanding of brand avoidance, since it does not elaborate on the elements that constitute 'negative brand meaning'.

Moreover, in the discussion chapters, it will become apparent that many factors contribute to brand avoidance, and to focus on a single concept, albeit a highly important one, would be an incorrect representation of the noticeable variety that existed within data and the phenomenon under study. Of course, this does not suggest that 'negative brand meaning' is an unreasonable explanation. Indeed, 'negative brand meaning' is a very sound reason that helps to explain why participants may avoid brands, but the significant question is what lies behind the construction of negative brand meaning? In this thesis, it is argued that 'negative brand meaning' is best understood through the use of the 'incompatible promises' metaphor. The various subordinate categories and themes then help to shed light on

the diverse ways in which a brand can develop into an 'incompatible promise', thereby providing a more useful understanding of brand avoidance.

Overall, in exploring the reasons for avoidance, four main themes emerged: experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral avoidance. With regards to managing brand avoidance, four themes emerged: transforming, diversifying, enhancing, and restoring promises; however, a distinct, but relevant, fifth theme also emerged in the form of 'irreconcilable promises'. These concepts will be elaborated on in discussion chapters three and four.

2.6.5 Assessing quality

Before this thesis progresses to a discussion of its findings, it is important to assess the research process and evaluate the researcher's interpretation of the data, so that the reader has confidence in the results of this study. Granted there are multiple ways of interpreting any qualitative data; however, some interpretations are still considered 'better' than others (Arnold and Fischer 1994; Spiggle 1994). Thus, many frameworks have been developed to assess the researcher's understanding of qualitative data and the phenomenon in question. Although the specific terms may differ slightly, the basic objectives remain the same; that is, to evaluate the quality of the interpretation and, therefore, the quality of the research.

2.6.5.1 *Evaluation of research quality*

In grounded theory, the emergent theory or research may be assessed on four classic criteria: fit, work, understandability, and generality (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). More specific criteria are put forward for the assessment of the research project and several questions may be used to evaluate the empirical grounding of a theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The various grounded theory criteria of assessing research quality and how the criteria have been addressed in this study are displayed in Table 5, 6 and 7 on the following pages.

It is important to note that Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998) suggest their criteria for evaluating grounded theory research are guidelines rather than "hard and fast" rules. Thus, each table elaborates on how this thesis has met with the aforementioned criteria, but if some criteria were deemed inappropriate, a justification is also presented.

Source	Grounded theory criteria	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990)	Fit- Does the grounded theory fit the data and area that it was developed from?	Although abstraction from the raw data is a necessary step when developing theory, care was taken during the coding process to ensure that emergent themes could be linked back to specific quotes.
	Work/Control/Relevance- Can the theory be used in the area to help predict/control the phenomenon?	Given the interpretivist approach of this study, prediction and control are not the main goals. Instead, the aim of this emergent theory is to increase understanding of a phenomenon. This research does shed light on brand avoidance.
	Understandable- Would it be understandable to the participants?	Although the researcher has confidence that lay people and the original participants would be able to understand and comprehend the findings of this research, this issue is less relevant given the hermeneutical approach adopted in this thesis. In other words, once the discourse has been transcribed, much more emphasis is placed on the researcher and his ability to make sense of the texts, than on the role of the original author/participants.
	Generality/Modifiability- Can it be generalised to similar situations within the immediate area, and can it be modified in the face of conflicting data?	The findings of this thesis provide reasonably theoretical explanations as to why some consumers hold brand avoidance attitudes. This understanding should shed light on other similar situations. However, the context in which the original study was conducted, and the inherent limitations to generalisibility, which that context brings, must not be forgotten. In other words, it is inappropriate for this interpretive research to make claims of external validity.

Table 5 General grounded theory criteria

Source	Grounded theory criteria for assessing the research process	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998)	How the sample was selected?	Grounded theory methodology recommends that the researcher provide adequate information to the reader pertaining to the research process. This methodology chapter and the following discussion chapters provide the reader with ample information regarding the questions presented on the left.
	What are the major emergent categories?	
	What were the incidents or events led to those categories?	
	How did theoretical sampling proceed and how did the theoretical formulations guide the data collection?	
	How and why was the core category selected?	Given the ontological and epistemological orientation of this research ‘validation’ is not really an appropriate term for the evaluation of this interpretive work.
	What were the hypotheses among categories and how were they formulated and validated?	
	Were there occasions where the hypotheses could not explain what was happening in the data, how were these discrepancies accounted for, and were hypotheses modified as a result?	

Table 6 Grounded theory criteria for assessing the research process

Source	Criteria for empirical grounding of a study	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998)	Are the concepts generated? In other words, is the theory grounded in the data?	Yes. This is similar to the criterion of ‘fit’ mentioned earlier. The main themes and categories resulted from a process of abstraction. This progression from emic to etic is necessary in a hermeneutical approach. Thus, although some of the category labels used in this thesis did not come from the vernacular of the participants, the findings have been checked to ensure that the interpretation of the data is ‘reasonable’. Furthermore, the emergent theory and all of its themes and categories can be traced back to the actual data.
	Are the concepts systematically related? There should be links and relationships between the various themes and categories.	There are many links between the categories, in the form of typologies and hierarchical relationships. The emergent theoretical model also attempts to shed light on the relationship between brand avoidance and various consumption and anti-consumption phenomena. The discussion elaborates on the relationships between the various themes and explains why they have been coded together. It also discusses when some themes are less related to others, thereby providing a justification as to why themes were coded into separate categories.
	Are the categories well developed, tightly linked, and do they have conceptual density? Simply put, did the categories reach theoretical saturation?	Yes. None of the participant’s experiences were ever identical, and some reasons for brand avoidance were mentioned less than others. However, all of the categories and themes that appear in this thesis are here because they emerged as salient reasons for brand avoidance.
	Is variation built into the theory? In other words, was brand avoidance examined under a series of different conditions?	Yes. The participants were encouraged to talk about brand avoidance across a wide variety of consumption situations. The result was data that portrayed brand avoidance across a variety of situations and varying levels of intensity.
	Are the broader conditions that affect the study built into its explanation? The researcher needs to acknowledge the context in which the study is undertaken.	Yes. This study adopts a social constructionist epistemology, historical realist ontology, and a hermeneutical and symbolic interactionist approach. Therefore, the socio-historical context in which this study was conducted has a direct influence on the participants’ experiences, the researcher’s interpretation of the data, and the subsequent findings, including the emergent theory. The society, in which the participants live, plays a large role in establishing what a brand means to that individual, the expectations the participant has around a consumption situation is also influenced by the time and place in which he or she exists. The contextualisation of this study is an important consideration that adds richness to the data, but also limits the generalisability of the findings.
	Has the process been taken into account? The theory should consider what happens to the phenomenon over time. (Continued overleaf)	Yes. The emergent theory attempts to show the temporal progression of brand avoidance. It considers not only considers the reasons that motivate brand avoidance, but also takes into account the conditions that may restrict or alleviate brand avoidance, and the consequences of allowing brand avoidance to continue.

	<p>Are the findings significant? The theory should show some creativity so that it contributes new information to the area.</p>	<p>Yes. This research is the first to integrate the variety of reasons that help to shed light on brand avoidance, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. It is also the first to address the circumstances that restrict or alleviate brand avoidance. Finally, the use of the negative promises framework is a creative twist that contributes new insight to the area.</p>
	<p>Does the theory stand the test of time among the relevant social and professional groups? Although the research has been conducted in a specific time and place, the impact and implications of the insights gained and theoretical contributions should still be able to transcend the relatively short life of the study.</p>	<p>At this point in time, it is impossible to address this criterion. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the categories, theory, understanding, and implications developed in this thesis will be relevant to future research and practice within the area.</p>

Table 7 Grounded theory criteria for assessing the empirical grounding of a study

Along similar lines to grounded theory, Arnold and Fischer (1994) recommend a set of criteria for hermeneutical projects, while McCracken (1988 p.52) suggests that explanations derived from the qualitative data must “exhibit the characteristics of good intellectual craftsmanship.” To this end, McCracken also proposes a set of criteria with which to evaluate the quality of an ‘explanation’. Their evaluative criteria are elaborated upon in Table 8 and 9, accompanied by a statement of how they relate to this thesis.

Source	Interpretive research quality criteria	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Arnold and Fischer 1994)	The interpretation of data should be coherent, free of contradiction, and supported by relevant evidence.	The distinction between the various categories and themes are explained in the discussion chapter. Although some incidences may be coded into multiple themes, as is sometimes the case when dealing with qualitative data, the use of those incidents to illustrate a particular point is soundly justified. The interpretation is supported by relevant evidence; this criteria is similar to the criteria of 'fit' addressed earlier.
	Relevant literature must be acknowledged.	The researcher has conducted an exhaustive literature review that helps to inform the findings of this research.
	The interpretation should be comprehensible and understandable to the readers, given their 'pre-understanding'.	The various iterations of this work have been presented at many seminars and conferences; it has also been evaluated by several judges. The interpretation has proven to be understandable to audiences. When misunderstandings occur, the researcher is always able to explain his interpretation through the use of a quotation, that is, by tracing the interpretation back to the data.
	The interpretation should be 'enlightening', revealing new insights that result in a change of pre-understanding or a 'fusion of horizons'.	The research provides a new and more comprehensive way of understanding brand avoidance. The interpretative endeavour also produced a 'fusing of horizons', which resulted in the researcher gaining a new appreciation for the participants' reasons for brand avoidance.
	The writing style should engage, stimulate, and interest the reader.	Although reading preferences vary from individual to individual, prior to submission, this thesis has been read by several colleagues. Thus, every effort has been made to make the thesis readable and the meaning clear and coherent.

Table 8 Arnold and Fisher's criteria for evaluating the quality of hermeneutical research

Source	Interpretive research quality criteria	Method of addressing in this thesis
McCracken 1988)	Exactness- Is the explanation stated with minimum ambiguity?	The explanation given in this thesis for brand avoidance is unambiguous. The core category of incompatible promises explains why people avoid brands, and the sub-themes give specific detail as to what constitutes an incompatible promise.
	Economy- Is the explanation elegant, in that it requires a minimum number of assumptions to function?	The core explanation for brand avoidance presented in this thesis requires very few assumptions. The core assumptions are that: 1) The positive and/or negative meaning a brand represents to an individual is a result of social construction. 2) Brands that possess negative meaning are avoided to prevent the addition of the negative meaning to the consumer's life. 3) The negative meaning of a brand can be thought of as an incompatible brand promise.
	Internal consistency- The assertions that make up the explanation should not contradict each other.	This has been addressed in Arnold and Fischer's (1994) first criteria in Table 8 above.
	External consistency- Does the explanation conform to what is generally known about the phenomenon?	Yes, the explanation of brand avoidance provided in this thesis does corroborate much of the existing area, but it also contributes a new way of looking at brand avoidance.
	Unified- In developing the explanation, has the researcher collapsed assertions where necessary but kept contradictory assertions separate when appropriate?	The movement from part to whole, during the coding process, involves the collapsing of similar incidents into higher order themes. However, the researcher was careful to keep distinct incidents as separate themes.
	Power- Does the explanation explain as much of the data as possible in the simplest way possible?	The core category of incompatible promises explains the participants' motivations for brand avoidance in the simplest way possible. More parsimonious explanations do exist, for instance, 'negative brand meaning', but that explanation was deemed too abstract to be useful.
	Fertility- Does the explanation have any value outside of the specific area of exploration? Are there opportunities for insight and new ideas?	This criteria is similar to the grounded theory criteria of 'generality' and 'significance', which have already been addressed in Tables 5 and 7

Table 9 McCracken's criteria for evaluating the quality of explanations derived from qualitative data

Taking a slightly different approach, Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) discuss three criteria that make ethnographic research 'convincing' to the *reader*. Although this thesis does not utilise an ethnographic methodology, any criteria that help to make some interpretative work more 'convincing' than others, is of interest to the assessment of this research. Their three criteria for 'convincingness', and how they relate to this thesis, are displayed in Table 10.

Source	Interpretive research quality criteria	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993)	Authenticity- was the researcher in the field and was there a genuine attempt to understand the participants' experiences?	This study did not use an ethnographic approach; therefore the term 'in the field' is an inappropriate criterion. However, the researcher did interview real consumers and all of the data used were developed from verbatim transcripts. During interviews, a genuine attempt was made to understand the participants' experiences by repeating their quotes back to them, thereby ensuring that their intended meaning was understood. Furthermore, the researcher's own understanding of the phenomenon was genuinely changed by the research experience, as he gained an appreciation of the many reasons for brand avoidance.
	Criticality- Will it make readers reflect on their preconceptions? Does it challenge conventional thought?	Hopefully, this research will be able to increase/augment the understanding of brand avoidance previously held by the reader.
	Plausibility- Does the interpretation seem reasonable while at the same time offering something distinctive?	The arguments put forward by this thesis should make sense to the reader, while also making an original contribution to the understanding of brand avoidance.

Table 10 Golden-Biddle and Locke's criteria for assessing the convincingness of an interpretation

Lastly, in her seminal article on qualitative data analysis, Spiggle (1994) provides a list of criteria for evaluating consumer research that uses qualitative data:

- 1) Usefulness- Does the work help to advance inquiry?
 - a. Is there a connection between the new emergent theory and the existing issues in the area?
 - b. Are the findings applicable to other settings?
- 2) Innovation- Do the findings offer a new way of understanding behaviour?
- 3) Integration- Is there a unifying concept that unites the various observations evident in the data? In other words, did the researcher abstract from the data to provide a more elevated understanding of the phenomenon?
- 4) Resonance- Does the research enrich the reader's understanding of the phenomenon?
- 5) Adequacy- Is there sufficient basis for the researcher's representation of the data?

Source	Interpretive research quality criteria	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Spiggle 1994)	Usefulness- Does the work help to advance inquiry? a) Is there a connection between the new emergent theory and the existing issues in the area? b) Are the findings applicable to other settings?	a) Is an issue of 'plausibility' (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993) or 'external consistency' (McCracken 1988). b) Concerns 'generality'. Both criteria have been addressed in Tables 5, 9, and 10.
	Innovation- Do the findings offer a new way of understanding behaviour?	This is an issue of 'significance', which has been addressed in Table 7.
	Integration- Is there a unifying concept, abstracted from data, which unites the various observations evident in the data?	Yes, the core category of 'incompatible promises' is an abstracted concept that unifies the various observations.
	Resonance- Does the research enrich the reader's understanding of the phenomenon?	This is similar to Golden-Biddle and Locke's (1993) criterion of criticality. The researcher is confident that this thesis will enrich the reader's understanding of brand avoidance.
	Adequacy- Is the researcher's representation of the data trustworthy?	The issue of 'trustworthiness' is multifaceted, and best considered using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria discussed in the next section.

Table 11 Spiggle's criteria for evaluating the quality of interpretive research

The last point mentioned by Spiggle (1994) 'adequacy', is an especially important one. Researchers who work with qualitative data often ask themselves if their interpretations of the data are 'correct', whether or not their level of abstraction from the raw data are 'reasonable', and what the findings would have been, had another researcher had carried out the study. In essence, these are questions of validity; however, in interpretive research the term 'validity' is usually replaced with 'trustworthiness'. Thus, interpretive researchers and grounded theorists seldom concern themselves with whether or not they have accurately measured what they originally intended to measure. Instead, the central aspect of grounded theory, and other interpretive research, is whether or not the interpretation of the data is 'trustworthy'.

2.6.5.2 Evaluation of research trustworthiness

'Trustworthiness' is often included in the assessment of interpretative research because it is an important indicator of a study's quality. That is why some of the evaluative criteria mentioned in the preceding section have already alluded to the concept of 'trustworthiness'. For instance, 'adequacy' (Spiggle 1994), 'fit' (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990), and 'authenticity' (Golden-Biddle and Locke

1993) are all concerned with the 'genuineness' of the researcher's interpretation of the data. Many academics have discussed the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Flint, Woodruff, and Gardial 2002; Golden-Biddle and Locke 1993; Hirschman 1986; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Spiggle 1994; Thompson 1990; Wallendorf and Belk 1989), but five classic criteria have been proposed: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and integrity. These criteria are elaborated upon in Table 12.

Many techniques may be used to ensure the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from qualitative data (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). However, the ontology and epistemology adopted by this thesis does not view the relationship between researcher and reality/knowledge as dualistic. Hence any understanding of brand avoidance, gained in this research, is co-constructed by an interaction between the researcher, the informant, and the society in which they exist.

Consequently, similar to the criteria for assessing research quality (Tables 5-11), some of the criteria used to evaluate 'trustworthiness' are also inappropriate for this study of brand avoidance. Table 12 summarises the trustworthiness evaluative criteria and states how this thesis has met with the criteria mentioned, where relevant. It also indicates where the criteria are less applicable, given the epistemological orientation of this research.

Source	Trustworthiness criteria	Method of addressing in this thesis
(Belk et al. 1988; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wallendorf and Belk 1989)	Credibility- Was the representation of the phenomenon accurate? Were quotes interpreted in a way that reflected what they really meant?	Credibility is concerned with ‘believability’, or whether or not the original author’s dialogue was interpreted ‘correctly’ or not. The hermeneutical approach adopted by this thesis places less emphasis on understanding the ‘original intention’ of the author, once the discourse has been converted to textual data (Arnold and Fischer 1994). Instead, more emphasis is placed on the co-created understanding that emerges from the interaction between the participants, the text, the researcher, and the broader socio-historical context in which the study was conducted. Thus, the concept of ‘credibility’ is not appropriate for this social constructionist thesis. In saying that, before the dialogue was converted to text, that is, during the interview, participant quotes were frequently cited back to them in order to ensure that their intended meaning, at that point in time, was correctly understood. ‘Credibility’ also concerns the adequacy of the researcher’s interpretation. The use of judges was another method that helped to ensure that this research remained ‘credible’ (discussed in the next section). Finally, the use of ‘negative case analysis’ ensured that the interpretation was ‘adequate’ because it forced the researcher to take into account instances that did not support the emergent interpretation.
	Transferability- Are the findings generalisable from one manifestation of the phenomenon to another? (Bearing in mind that no two settings are identical, what are the subtle differences?)	This issue is similar to ‘generality’ and has already been addressed in Table 5.
	Dependability- How stable/consistent was the interpretation? (Bearing in mind that no two events, researchers, nor informants will ever be identical.)	This criteria concerns ‘reliability’, more specifically; it asks if the insights that arise from this interpretation can endure over time. Given the historical realist ontology and social constructionist epistemology of this thesis, it is likely that the motivations for brand avoidance will change over time, as society and individuals change. Some participants indicated that their brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours would last some time into the future, while others admitted that their commitments were probably transitory. In any case, there is currently no practical way of assessing this criterion, since this research was not longitudinal. Consequently, the value of being able to identify which reasons for brand avoidance endure over time, versus those that are more fleeting, are addressed in the ‘future research’ section.
	Confirmability - Can the researcher’s interpretive path be followed from raw data to findings to theory?	This is similar to the grounded theory criterion of ‘fit’, which has been addressed in Table 5.
(Wallendorf and Belk 1989)	Integrity- Can the researcher trust the informants to tell the truth?	As discussed earlier, in section 2.6.2.1 “Interviewing style and rapport”, several steps were taken to build rapport and make the participant feel comfortable, so that they may respond in a ‘truthful’ manner. However, in spite of these measures, all research involves the risk of participants withholding information or purposefully responding in ‘dishonest’ ways. Thus, this researcher can only hope that the manner in which the interviews were implemented was conducive to the integrity of the informants’ responses.

Table 12 Criteria for evaluating trustworthiness

2.6.5.3 *The use of judges*

As Table 12 illustrates, there are many criteria for assessing the 'trustworthiness' of research that uses qualitative data, some criteria being more suitable for this thesis than others. Given the social constructionist orientation of this thesis, trustworthiness and validity, can more appropriately be thought of in terms of 'reasonability'. In other words, the researcher does not claim that his interpretations are the most trustworthy or the only valid interpretations of the data. Instead, he needs to ensure that his interpretation appear 'reasonable' in the eyes of potential readers and audiences.

One appropriate method of ensuring the 'reasonability' of the current interpretation was through the use of several judges, who are familiar to the area of consumer behaviour and marketing, and who are able to use their expertise and 'pre-understanding' to assess the 'reasonability' of the current thesis's findings.

Therefore, each set of reduced themes and the various iterations of the emergent theoretical model were presented to judges for evaluation. The purpose was not for the judges to agree on identical themes or to assess the researcher's analytical objectivity. Instead, the aim was to query the rationale for the development of existing themes, unearth potentially new themes, contribute fresh insights, and discuss possible amendments. Simply put, the use of other people aims to enhance the outcome of the interpretive analysis (Malterud 2001; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Although many colleagues were exposed to the research findings at various stages of development, overall, four main judges were utilised throughout the interpretive process. The first judge was a female marketing academic with a management and psychology background; the second was a clinical psychologist; the third was a male marketing academic specialising in advertising research; and the fourth was a female professor of marketing communications. All judges had extensive knowledge of human behaviour and/or marketing concepts, as well as academic PhD degrees. Thus, their evaluation of the research findings, and their recommendations, contributed to the reasonability and quality of this interpretive endeavour.

The comments, queries, and suggestions of the experts were acknowledged, answered, or incorporated into a reiteration of the theoretical model. As mentioned earlier, the iterative coding process utilised in this thesis was far from linear and this circular path also applies to this thesis's tests of trustworthiness. Especially, since many of the suggestions and questions raised by the judges were integral to the interpretive procedure and to the researcher's attempts to negotiate an

understanding of brand avoidance. The following two examples illustrate how the judges contributed to the method.

Initial attempts at a conceptual model involved coding constructs such as word of mouth, lack of value, and the negative meaning attributed to a brand, as three distinctive categories. However, the first judge asked if those three themes were related; further analysis, interpretation, and abstraction suggested that, indeed, they all shared similar characteristics. Specifically, these themes all allude to the perception an individual has towards a brand. Thus, during this iteration those three themes were re-coded by the researcher under a new higher-order theme entitled 'perceptual avoidance'. The researcher then re-read through the units of dialog to ensure that the fit between the reiterated categories and the original data was still true.

Later on, another judge was used in a similar way; she voiced her concerns pertaining to the category of 'perceptual avoidance'. Both the researcher and judge agreed that the term 'perceptual' was too broad and could theoretically encompass anything, since everything is 'perceived'. Consequently, a further iteration by the researcher resulted in perceptual avoidance being split into two distinct categories: 'deficit-value avoidance' and 'identity avoidance'. It was decided that deficit-value avoidance accounts for the incidents where a brand is avoided because it represents a lack of utilitarian value/worth to the consumer. In contrast, identity avoidance concerns the incidents where a brand is avoided because it symbolises something which the individual does not want to incorporate into his or her identity/self-concept. Both are still avoided for 'perceptual' reasons, but the reason for avoidance is based on the two different ways in which brands are thought to impact on the individual's life.

The two paragraphs above provide a very brief, and simplified, glimpse of the iterative process which took place between the researcher, text/data, and judges. During the process, each reiteration of the theoretical model was followed up with another round of comparative analysis. Newly positioned categories were compared with other categories, and the codes from which they comprised, to ensure fit between data, codes, categories, and the theoretical model. In reality, the data were read numerous times and underwent much iteration.

In spite of procedures that attempt to ensure the 'trustworthiness' of research, it should be re-emphasised that there are still multiple ways of interpreting most qualitative data (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1990). No hermeneutical study

assumes that its interpretation (or any other interpretation) is the only 'true/correct' understanding (Schwandt 2000). Thus, when multiple interpretations do occur, there is no need for them to be mutually exclusive (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Therefore, the use of judges is not an attempt to ensure objectivity or to discover the 'truth'; instead, it is an attempt to negotiate a better understanding of brand avoidance. The understanding achieved in this manner should be more sophisticated than if the interpretation was conducted by a single researcher. Therefore, this research can only argue that its findings are 'reasonably trustworthy' rather than 'objective' and that, by the end of analysis, there should be better understanding of the brand avoidance than when the research was first conducted.

2.7 Summary of Methods and Procedure

Since the objective of this study was to generate a theory to help understand brand avoidance, the grounded theory approach was utilised to gather and analyse qualitative data. Sensitisation interviews were conducted initially, followed by the main set of interviews. Various methods of recruiting informants were employed through purposive, convenient, and theoretical sampling. As demonstrated in the next few chapters, other sources of data, such as existing literature, were also used to inform the emergent theory. The constant comparison method of coding was used for data analysis.

The interpretation of the raw data went through an abductive and iterative process (constant comparison and the hermeneutic circle). Various checks were used to ensure that the research was as 'trustworthy' as possible. For instance, the emergent themes and theory were evaluated, and strengthened, by four judges to ensure that the level of abstraction was 'reasonable'. Grounded theory methodology insists that the findings may be traced back to the raw data; thus all higher level abstractions can still be linked to relevant evidence. Negative case analyses were also used to ensure that the interpretation of the emergent themes remained balanced, and lastly, interviews were conducted in way that, hopefully, encouraged 'honest' responses from informants.

Overall, the grounded theory and hermeneutical analysis resulted in four main types of brand avoidance, which will be discussed in chapter three. Five main themes emerged in relation to when brand avoidance might be restricted or alleviated. These findings will be discussed in chapter four. Table 13 (page 78) and Table 15 (page 175) provide brief outlines of the brand avoidance conceptual framework while Appendices 7-11 provide more detailed descriptions of the categories that comprise

the conceptual framework, in addition to the relevant memos used to code and define categories during grounded theory analysis.

All of the main themes and sub themes help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the brand avoidance phenomenon, but the core category that unites them all is the concept of an 'incompatible promise'. An emergent theory that attempts to integrate this core category, the main themes, and the sub themes to each other, as well as position brand avoidance within the wider consumption system, will be elaborated on in chapter five.

CHAPTER THREE: THE REASONS FOR BRAND AVOIDANCE

This thesis adopts an interpretive approach to research and uses qualitative data in an attempt to develop an integrative understanding of the brand avoidance phenomenon. One particularly effective way of understanding the data, the researcher's interpretation, and the contribution of this research, is to combine the findings with a discussion. Thus, this chapter begins by briefly describing the findings of this research, namely, the four main types of brand avoidance that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. Following this, the remainder of this chapter discusses, in more depth, the motivations and reasons for brand avoidance. Relevant data and the extant literature will be woven into this discussion section and the specific contributions that this thesis makes to existing knowledge will be made clear.

Four main types of avoidance emerged from the grounded theory and hermeneutical analysis of qualitative data. Experiential avoidance of brands emerged from incidents involving direct first hand negative experiences with the brand (Section 3.1). Identity avoidance comprised the incidents where a brand was avoided because its image was perceived to be symbolically incongruent with the individual's self-concept/identity (Section 3.2). Deficit-value avoidance occurred when a brand was construed to be inadequate in value (Section 3.3). Lastly, moral avoidance involved ideological resistance towards a brand because of socio-political and ethical issues (Section 3.4).

Table 13 has been organised to reflect the levels of abstraction, coding, and classification to which the qualitative data was subjected. This organisation of themes is also consistent with the hermeneutical movement from emic to etic themes. An emic interpretation focuses on the experience of individual participants, while an etic interpretation is more 'conceptually abstract' and attempts to position the individual's experiences within a "broader system of socio-cultural meanings" (Thompson 1996 p. 394).

The sub themes hover close to the data and help to illustrate some specific examples of the participant's brand avoidance incidents. Consistent with grounded theory, these sub themes highlight the variability that exists within the data. Main themes represent the next level of abstraction; here, the trends that connect the similar sub themes were teased out, resulting in the emergence of some more parsimonious reasons for brand avoidance. Further abstraction from the data gave rise to the

'types of avoidance' and 'motivation for avoidance' columns. Here, the researcher attempts to negotiate a fuller understanding of the brand avoidance phenomenon and contribute to theory by providing the nomenclature for the various types of brand avoidance, in addition to incorporating the notion of negative promises.

Types of avoidance	Motivation for avoidance	Main themes	Sub themes
Experiential Avoidance	The consumer is motivated to avoid undelivered promises.	Unmet expectations	Poor performance Hassle factor Store environment
Identity Avoidance	The consumer is motivated to avoid symbolically unappealing promises.	Undesired self	Negative reference group Inauthenticity Deindividuation
Deficit-value Avoidance	The consumer is motivated to avoid value inadequate promises.	Unacceptable trade-off	Unfamiliarity Aesthetic insufficiency Food favouritism
Moral Avoidance	The consumer is motivated to avoid socially detrimental promises.	Country effects Anti-hegemony	Animosity Financial patriotism Monopoly resistance Impersonalisation Corporate irresponsibility

Table 13 The four types of brand avoidance

The main research question that this thesis aims to address is why do people avoid brands? It is well established in existing literature that consumers may be attracted to certain brands because of the 'positive' meanings those brands convey; therefore it follows that consumers may also be repelled by the 'negative' meanings associated with certain brands. However, it is important to explore the notion of 'negative brand meaning' more deeply; in other words, what motivates the construction of negative brand meaning in a consumer? Thus, this chapter will elaborate on the reasons and motivations underlying the four main types of brand avoidance.

As discussed in the methodology chapter, brands are symbols of communication, constructed through the interaction between the brand, the consumer, and society. Therefore, brand consumption is based on the meaning a brand possesses within a socio-historical context; implicitly, this means that brand avoidance is also a socially constructed phenomenon. Thus, although the incidents of brand avoidance shown in this thesis are linked to individual quotes, it is important to remember that a person's

understanding of, and reasons for, consumption and avoidance largely arises from the cultural context in which the participants have been brought up.

Since the understanding of brand avoidance is informed by a circular flow between the specific (part) and the general (whole), there are various ways of presenting a discussion chapter. While the coding process was presented as moving from the specific to the general, in contrast, this discussion has been structured to flow from higher levels of abstraction down to the more specific. Therefore, the type of avoidance, the motivation that drives consumers, and the main themes, are discussed before the sub themes. Presenting the main motivation for a type of brand avoidance first, is intended to provide the reader with a thread (or context) that helps him or her to better understand the subsequent themes and sub themes.

As this discussion will demonstrate, not only does this thesis support the contentions of existing research, but it will also contribute additional insights to the extant literature. Moreover, by developing an integrated understanding of brand avoidance, this thesis will also extend the current one-dimensional approach that researchers have been undertaking in their studies of brand avoidance and anti-consumption.

3.1 Experiential Avoidance: Undelivered Promises

As Berry (2000) suggests, few factors are as influential in shaping the meaning of a brand as the consumer's actual experiences. Thus, in terms of this thesis, a negative experience may be one particularly powerful reason for brand avoidance. A survey reported that 49% of consumers make an effort to avoid brands when they shop; of those, 81% say that their avoidance was due to a bad experience (Dolliver 2001). Certainly, many incidents of brand avoidance mentioned by the participants of this research involved some sort of negative consumption experience.

In this thesis, 'experience' refers to the consumer's first hand encounter with a product or service brand, relative to their prior expectations. Therefore, this study focuses on the 'outcome/performance' aspect of experience rather than the 'hedonic' component, which encompasses a different area of academic scholarship, 'experiential consumption' (Arnould and Price 1993; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Research on 'experiential consumption' is more process-orientated and is concerned with the emotions, feelings, and hedonism associated with the whole act of consumption. Although some incidents of experiential avoidance do involve negative hedonic components, for instance, the negative consumption experience of a unpleasant store environment, this category mainly focuses on the more tangible

'outcome' based perspective. Thus, 'experience' is defined by the individual's assessment of a consumption outcome in relation to his or her expectations.

From an emic perspective, the category of 'experiential avoidance' has emerged from a number of specific participant incidents. The sub themes: poor performance, hassle factor, and negative store environment, remain closer to the data and help to illustrate the more specific circumstances in which experiential avoidance has occurred in this thesis's participants. The common defining property of the sub themes is that they all involve some sort of personal experience involving a negative outcome, dissatisfaction with the brand, and subsequent brand avoidance. Thus, from an etic perspective, at the core of each negative consumption experience is an unmet expectation (main theme) caused by an undelivered brand promise.

3.1.1 Main theme: Unmet expectations

Experiential avoidance comprises the incidents where performance outcomes are below consumer expectations; thus, the main theme in experiential avoidance is 'unmet expectations'. Usually a consumer's expectations are defined within a societal context; in other words, what a consumer expects in a consumption situation is socially constructed. A company can also successfully manage consumer expectations, to a certain extent, by providing realistic brand promises. However, as this discussion will reveal, the current trend in marketing is the use of grandiose brand promises, which run the risk of being undeliverable, thereby resulting in unmet expectations for the consumer.

Literature in the area of disconfirmation and dissatisfaction posits that unmet expectations may lead to negative disconfirmation, which may then develop into dissatisfaction (Halstead 1989; Oliver 1980; Swan and Combs 1976). Following dissatisfaction, a consumer might exit the brand relationship by switching to another brand (Hirschman 1970; Oliva et al. 1992). In addition to isolated incidents of exiting, previous research also reveals that negative consumption experiences may have longer term impacts on a brand, in the form of personal boycotts and grudge-holding behaviour (Aron 2001; Hunt and Hunt 1990; Hunt, Hunt, and Hunt 1988; Sen, Gurhan-Canli, and Morwitz 2001). As the quotes in this section will illustrate, dissatisfaction caused by unmet expectations does contribute to brand avoidance.

The brand promises framework may also be used to inform the current findings and to further expand the extant literature on brand avoidance. This thesis defines brands as a multifaceted construct (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). Therefore,

the brand promise is another important aspect of a brand's constellation of values. The promises framework suggests that one important aspect of branding, in particular, service dominant brands, involves making promises to consumers (Balmer and Gray 2003; Berry 2000; Bitner 1995; Brodie et al. 2006; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; Vallaster and De Chernatony 2005).

A promise creates a reason to expect something; therefore it is undeniable that brand promises lead to expectations (Gronroos 2006). Indeed, within the consumer's mind, the meaning of a brand is partially made up of a set of expectations about what is supposed to happen when the consumer purchases a brand (Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000). While most of these expectations are developed within a societal context, the brand promise also contributes to consumer expectations. Of course, the danger of making promises is that the firm must then deliver on those promises.

The modern day consumer is constantly bombarded with fantastical promises of extraordinary consumption experiences. Many of these brand promises lead to heightened expectations, some of which may not be fulfilled. Although consumers may not explicitly acknowledge brands as promises, when consumers choose to purchase certain brands, they do expect, sometimes implicitly, that particular promises will be honoured. Therefore, promises, and the expectations they create, may be explicit or implicit (Gronroos 2006), and when brand promises are delivered in a way that is consistent with consumer expectations, it encourages repurchase (Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000). However, with regards to this thesis, if consumers' actual experiences do not match what they have been led to expect by the brand promise, dissatisfaction may result (Halstead 1989; Oliver 1980; Swan and Combs 1976) and brand avoidance may occur (Lee and Conroy 2005; Oliva et al. 1992; Thompson et al. 2006).

Thus, one potential disadvantage of 'branding' is that the company is essentially making a promise to the consumer about a certain level of performance or a certain type of consumption experience. If the company is unable to deliver its promise, it risks disappointing the consumer. Therefore, this thesis contributes to the dissatisfaction and branding literature by positing that sometimes a brand can be a liability, because a brand has the ability to set the consumer up for disappointment regarding the company's products and services.

The following participant clearly illustrates how, in some circumstances, a powerful brand may actually be a liability for the company as it heightens the expectations of a product:

I purchased a Sony walkman... maybe after a year, it started rolling [jamming] the tape... when you fast forwarded it or rewinded the tape... So I decided to discard the Sony and I didn't get a replacement... sometimes the brand name does not equate to the quality that you'd expect from the brand.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

The expectations that RH had of his walkman were created by his interpretation of the *Sony* brand promise. However, it is clear that his expectations were not met, thereby resulting in future brand avoidance.

Brands are symbols of communication and remain fairly consistent once an individual's understanding of a brand has been constructed. Part of customer-based brand equity is the notion of brand loyalty (Aaker 1996). At the most basic level, brand loyalty could be defined as repeat purchase (Baldinger and Rubinson 1996; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Jacoby and Kyner 1973). Since brands are a mark of consistency, a consumer may decide to continue purchasing a brand simply because he or she assumes that one positive experience should predict another. As Berry (2000 p. 129) suggests "A strong service brand is essentially a promise of future satisfaction." Indeed, one aspect of branding is the promise of consistency between different entities that share the same brand name (Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000).

Conversely, in experiential avoidance, an undelivered brand promise results in unmet expectations, which cumulate in a negative consumption experience. The consumer re-constructs the brand to become representative of the negative experience/undelivered promise. Unfortunately for the brand, the consistency principle also applies to unpleasant incidents; consequently, the brand is avoided by the individual in the future as it becomes an indication of undelivered promises. Thus, not only does a brand promise run the initial risk of being undelivered, but a brand can also become an indicator of future dissatisfaction. In other words, a brand may be avoided because in the consumer's mind it has, ironically, become a promise of an undelivered promise.

The participant below illustrates how brand promises may be undelivered, which results in unmet expectations, thereby leading to dissatisfaction, and subsequent brand avoidance:

I just remember the first time I tried McDonald's... it was probably in '93 when I arrived in New Zealand, because they didn't have McDonald's in Croatia... I remember I expected more of it because it's such a, "Oh

McDonald's, it's such a cool thing!" At least from where I come from it was thought of as 'high'... and then McDonald's, yeah it was really horrible when I tried. (*Interviewer: Tell me the story of what happened*) I was really surprised at the size of it first of all... for my dad or for any bigger man it's like two bites, you can't really have a proper meal first of all and the taste, it was tasteless. Texture-wise it just felt so artificial, the bun, so sweet and then that steak or whatever they put, the actual hamburger patty, just so artificial in every way... that really put me off.

JJ Int 3 (Female, 25)

JJ's quotation begins with mythic expectations of *McDonald's*, expectations that are undoubtedly socially constructed from the culture in which she lived, as well as *McDonald's* marketing of the 'Golden Arches'. However, when her expectations were not met, that is, the brand promise not delivered, the consumption experience quickly became negative. Her quote illustrates the dangers of a brand that over promises and under delivers. JJ's expectations of *McDonald's* were grand; therefore the brand promise was more likely to be undelivered, the gap between experience and expectation larger, and subsequent dissatisfaction more intense, all of which contribute to the development of brand avoidance.

It should be emphasised that the construction of a negative consumption experience is only possible within a social context. According to historical realism, social constructionism, and symbolic interactionism, the meaning of any object is based on the shared understanding of it. Thus, consumers' expectations of brands are based on a shared understanding of what is an acceptable product and brand, and what is not. Based on the culture in which JJ grew up, her socially constructed understanding of *McDonald's* is that it should be 'cool'; however, as her quote suggests, her expectation was unmet; as a result, JJ construes her experience with *McDonald's* as being negative.

Unmet expectations also affected service brands. A service brand's core promise is the service it provides. Therefore, it is not surprising that avoidance occurs when service brands fail to deliver the quality service, which is normally expected.

The participant below makes a very clear link between unmet expectations and the service brand:

Their staff weren't particularly nice in the Rodney Wayne [hairdressing chain] that I went to and they weren't very helpful... they didn't make any suggestions and they just kind of do their jobs but they weren't doing anything extra, and because of the type of work that I do, I kind of know what the expectation is, you kind of expect when you go to people for customer service you expect more from them, you expect more than the

basic kind of stuff... I think maybe you feel valued... I guess it depends what your values are and to me it's important to treat people nicely.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

SR now avoids the *Rodney Wayne* brand, because as she clearly states, many of her expectations have been unmet. In other words, the brand has been unable to deliver on the implicit promises expected of a customer service orientated business. In addition to highlighting the link between unmet expectations and brand avoidance, SR also refers to her values during a negative service encounter. SR's own occupation in the service administration industry may have influenced her understanding of what 'good service' entails, as well as her values of being nice to clients. A successful brand is one that is able to match its values to those of its customers (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). In the case of *Rodney Wayne*, the minimal service provided by the employees resulted in a mismatch of values between SR and the service brand. Another consumer recalled his experiences of the banking industry and its services:

Lots of bank, bad experiences, just being inflexible, you'd always assume that all banks would be inflexible, then you speak to other people who are with other banks and they tell you "That's just ridiculous and it shouldn't be happening... you shouldn't be with that bank, go try this bank" so you switch banks and you find it's a completely different world... I was with Barclays who are the number one bank in the UK for years... they got to the point where they were just being really inflexible, they weren't helping, their banking charges were really expensive, their credit card charges were really expensive.

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

For AR, the inflexibility and inferior service offering of his bank were the main reasons for brand avoidance. His case is interesting because prior to talking to his friends, AR actually "assumed that all banks are inflexible". Therefore, his expectations, albeit of a low standard, were being met. Thus, he did not act on his experiences of poor service, or bother to switch banks, until his socially constructed understanding and expectation of banks was altered by others around him; only then, did brand avoidance occur.

Previous research has detailed a plethora of causes for negative service experiences. Day and Bodur (1978) investigated dissatisfaction with services and concluded that the most common reason for dissatisfaction was that "the service was rendered in a careless and unprofessional manner" (1978 p. 265). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1985; 1988) seminal work on service quality suggests that a

service experience may be evaluated on five dimensions; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. It would be plausible to assume that a negative assessment of one or any combination of those factors could lead to brand avoidance.

Furthermore, an analysis of critical incidents by Keaveney (1995) reveals eight general reasons for why customers switched service providers. Similarly, Arnold et al's (2004) recent investigation into delightful and terrible shopping experiences reveal 13 specific factors that contribute to 'terrible shopping experiences'. The findings of those studies are displayed in Table 14.

(Keaveney 1995)	(Arnold et al. 2004)
1) Price- high price, increased price, unfair or deceptive price.	Lack of interpersonal effort- salesperson not at all helpful.
2) Inconvenience- location and having to wait for service.	Lack of interpersonal engagement salesperson was unfriendly/rude or ignored customer.
3) Core service failure- mistakes, billing error, service 'catastrophes'.	Lack of problem resolution- would not go outside of rules.
4) Service encounter- uncaring, impolite, unresponsive, lack of knowledge.	Lack of interpersonal distance- salesperson very pushy.
5) Response to service failure- none, unsatisfactory, reluctant.	Lack of time commitment- took no time to look for product or help.
6) Better competition available.	Lack of ethics- dishonesty.
7) Ethical- dishonesty, intimidation, unsafe practices, conflicts of interest.	Lack of skills or knowledge.
8) Involuntary switching and other reasons.	Other customers are rude or unpleasant.
9)	Lack of expected acquisition- could not find what they were looking for.
10)	Lack of expected value-price too high/expensive/waste of time or money.
11)	Lack of technical quality- product did not perform to expectations.
12)	Unpleasant atmosphere
13)	Customer's own mood or lack of time impacted negatively on the experience.

Table 14 Negative consumption experiences

Although the aforementioned studies share many factors that are also relevant to this thesis they do not explore the relationship between the negative consumption experience and branding *per se*. Thus, this thesis contributes to theory by suggesting that when a negative consumption experience is associated with a brand: a) it may be motivated by some sort of undelivered (implicit or explicit) promise that results in an unmet expectation, b) the brand then becomes re-constructed in the mind of the

consumer to represent that undelivered promise, and c) the brand is subsequently avoided by the consumer in the future.

3.1.1.1 Sub theme: Poor performance

One sub theme within experiential brand avoidance is 'poor performance'. Most brand promises implicitly involve a fundamental assurance that products and services will function at a basic level expected by the consumer. However, as the participants of this research reveal, some brand promises of basic functionality are not delivered, which results in subsequent brand avoidance.

Various incidents of 'poor performance' were coded into this sub theme, such as first hand experiences with poor quality, substandard performance, lack of durability, adverse impact on health, or an unpleasant taste. In all cases, the participant's constructions of the brand become based on his or her negative first hand experiences. As mentioned earlier, in addition to exiting the relationship, the participant's negative construction of the brand may manifest into future avoidance of the brand.

I had a tummy bug from McDonald's, I just don't like...it's too greasy, and I don't like the taste, it's horrible... I would go to McDonald's as a last resort; I don't like the meat that McDonald's use... It tastes kind of funny.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

SR's quote illustrates poor performance at the most basic level. In terms of the wider societal norms in which this study was conducted, a consumer generally expects that a person does not get sick from restaurant food. Although individual tastes vary, consumers still expect that food will not taste 'horrible'. The failure of the brand to deliver on this basic implicit promise and to meet expectations, results in negative disconfirmation and subsequent avoidance. SR's use of the term 'last resort' communicates the extent to which she is willing to avoid the *McDonald's* brand owing to her negative experiences.

Other cases of poor performance are displayed below, and help to further highlight how brand avoidance may form when there is a gap between what is expected by the consumer and the negative disconfirmation of a failed consumption experience:

I wanted a cheap pair of soccer shoes once and I bought a pair there [The Warehouse a discount retail chain] and they nearly destroyed my feet, so I definitely wouldn't buy shoes there again.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

I don't know the actual brand in particular, but it would be things like what I would buy at The Warehouse, I would typically avoid, purely because we've tried them before and they haven't lasted as long as probably one of the bigger named brands.

MT Int 16 (Male, 42)

Two points of interest emerge from the quotations above. First, the failure of the product to function properly forms the basis of JH and MT's avoidance attitudes. The epistemological viewpoint of social constructionism is apparent here, since consumer expectations can only develop within a socio historical context. JH's description of how poor performance 'nearly destroyed' his feet, vividly illustrates his negative consumption experience. However, his expectation, that sport shoes should be non-detrimental to his feet, is only possible when compared to the typically experiences of other consumers within his wider social circle. Likewise, MT expects the products he purchases to 'last' a certain amount of time. Once again, his quote highlights the socially constructed nature of consumer expectations, as he compares the performance of *The Warehouse* shoe brands to 'other bigger named brands', and his knowledge of other consumers' experiences.

Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) assert that the functional value of a product is the primary driver of consumer choice. Although consumers buy different products for different reasons, the most basic expectation in most cases, is adequate performance. Thus, branding or any form of marketing communication may only add value to a product if it is able to satisfy a minimum requirement. Of course, this 'minimum requirement' is constructed within a socio-historical context and makes up the implicit brand promise. If a product performs below this expectation, the associated brand may be avoided.

Second, the excerpts above also reveal a less intuitive feature of brand avoidance. The actual product brand was not recalled by either participant; instead, the retail brand was blamed for poor performance. *The Warehouse* typically advertises its retail brand rather than the various product brands it stocks, and thus, its retail brand is better known than its product brands. As MT's quote suggests, when compared to the 'bigger named brands' many of the product brands stocked by *The Warehouse* are relatively unknown. Since the product brand is rarely remembered, in the above instances, when a consumer encounters a negative experience it is the retail brand that receives the majority of unfavourable attitudes, because the retail brand is more memorable. As Aaker (1996 p. 15) suggests, "It is one thing to be remembered, and quite another to avoid being remembered for the wrong reasons".

In the incidents quoted above, the image of the retail brand is devalued because it stocks an inferior product brand. However, the brand is an evolving value constellation, co-produced by the various parties within the marketing system (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). Thus, even though the product brand may initially escape brand avoidance by being unmemorable, the associative network model of brand knowledge suggests that sooner or later the product brand and the retail brand become linked. What begins as a negative association of a retail brand, caused by failed product, soon turns to an assumption that it is an inferior retail brand that stocks inferior product brands. The following quotes demonstrate this halo effect, where the inferiority of the product *and* retail brand have become intermingled:

I would avoid Transonic, yeah I'm thinking the electrical brands that The Warehouse stock, I would avoid... I've bought the products and found it to be inferior to the more mainstream brands such as Sony or Phillips.

MS Int 5 (Female, 46)

There's this brand from The Warehouse, it's called Dynamic... portable radios with CD players, I would definitely avoid it, because after buying it, the CD wouldn't spin properly... another one, I would avoid Cascade... they make general electric appliances, I bought a kettle and after two months of using it the heating element started to rust... both of them from The Warehouse.

KL Int 11 (Male, 20)

Once again poor performance formed the basis of these brand avoidance attitudes; in this case both participants are able to recall the failed product brands. The quotations indicate a negative attitude towards the retail brand *and* the product brand. Thus, both the retail brand and some specific product brands stocked by *The Warehouse* are avoided. This halo-effect positions both the retail and product brands in a perpetual cycle of devaluation. To illustrate, an inferior product may fail, resulting in damage to the retail brand. The retailer is then construed, by consumers and other organisations, to be inferior and therefore assumed to stock inferior product brands. Premium brands wishing to preserve their brand image may avoid being stocked by such a retail brand. This leaves the retailer with only inferior brands that are more likely to fail, and so the cycle continues.

An intermingling of services and products was apparent in some incidents of poor performance, and could be observed across a variety of service brands, whether the brand was a relatively pure service, such as hairdressers or banks; goods-intensive services such as airlines; or goods and services hybrids, such as fast food or other

retail brands (Berry and Parasuraman 1991). The following quote illustrates the inseparability of products and service in some industries:

I've actually flown with Thai Airlines a number of times. While the service has been really good, and at times quite exceptional compared to some of the other carriers... when an inside panel falls off, when the whole plane literally shakes and you see a screw drop out, it does raise some concerns. When I addressed it, basically they said "Oh that happens all the time" and I was like, "That's not a very good answer..." When the screw fell out of the ceiling above us... I could see right through the panel, there were gaps in the panels... I know it's not on every plane because I flew Air New Zealand at Christmas time and I looked up, it's become a habit now, at the interior ceiling of the plane and there are no gaps but... two different times on a Thai airway's plane I've looked up and there are gaps between the panel where you can see the wiring and everything else. The skeleton and framework of the plane, and I'm going, "Should I be looking at that?" (*Interviewer: Would you fly with them again?*) I would try to avoid it if possible.

MT Int 16 (Male, 42)

Apart from the inadequate answer from the flight attendant, MT believes that the general service of *Thai Airlines* is 'exceptional'; thus, in this particular incident, product performance has let the service brand down. As a goods-intensive service (Berry and Parasuraman 1991), MT's socially constructed expectations of airline brands are that the plane should function well, or at least appear to do so. His expectations are further confirmed by his comparisons of *Thai Airlines* with other brands. Therefore, the implicit promise of the airline brand, which was to provide a safe journey, was not delivered as confidently as it could have been.

In some cases, poor service experience can also impact negatively upon product selection. The following passage illustrates the relationship between services on products:

I'd expect better help in selecting things, not having some 15 year old kid that's walking around. I can't even remember being approached in The Warehouse in the couple of times I've been in there buying. No one saying "Do you need help with anything?"... Particularly if it's... things like TV's and stuff. I'd expect the person selling them to be able to know about them and actually be there to talk to you.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

For high involvement product purchases, JH expects the service to be more proactive and for the employees of the retail brand to have a certain level of product knowledge. The service, in this case, failed to fulfil its function, which was to make

the purchase decision easier. Thus, an undelivered promise resulted in a negative consumption experience and subsequent brand avoidance of *The Warehouse* by JH.

Literature in the area of product failure asserts that consumers are more likely to be angry if the cause of the disconfirmatory experience is attributable to the company (Folkes 1984). Thus, in relation to this study, if the participants had thought any part of the negative consumption experience was due to their own fault, it would have been less likely that brand avoidance would have developed. Furthermore, the brand in those circumstances is unlikely to be re-constructed as a future indicator of a negative incident, since the company was not at fault.

Most of the participants who informed this sub theme attributed the negative service experience to be the fault of the company, which resulted in avoidance of the service brand. Previous literature asserts that the company may be blamed for a product or service failure on three grounds (Weiner 1980 cited in Bitner 1992; Folkes 1984; Klein and Dawar 2004).

- 1) Stability- does failure occur consistently or is it a chance event?
- 2) Locus- is the company at fault or is someone else to blame?
- 3) Control- is the company able to control/prevent the problem or is the fault beyond the company's control?

Certainly, in the incidents raised by our participants for both negative product and service experiences, the problem was seen as stable; in other words, the brand promise was undelivered on more than one occasion. The company was also considered to be directly responsible for the failure (locus) and was thought to possess the ability to prevent or remedy the issue (control).

(Interview: Are these most McDonald's or just the ones you go to) I've been to quite a few McDonald's but it all seems to be the same. Doesn't seem to matter which one you go to, whether it's the one in Queen Street. Or whether its Panmure or Paptotoe all over the place, and it doesn't seem to matter what time you go either; they always seem to take forever, and it's usually when you're in a hurry. That's why you drive through because you want to get somewhere and it just takes ages.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

The implicit promise of fast food service brands is that the food will be delivered quickly, rather than 'take forever'. When this basic promise is not delivered, SR's expectations are unmet and dissatisfaction occurs. Furthermore, SR construes the negative service experiences to be the fault of the brand's employees and the

substandard service has been stable in three different stores. These factors all contribute to SR's brand avoidance of *McDonald's*.

(Interviewer: What was it about the service?) I think the shop attendant, their [Mobil] courtyard attendant wasn't very willing to help on that particular occasion, so I don't want to put up with this. Consistently I've had bad service from them. Not good car washing services, generally a bad attitude. *(Interview: Is this the same store?)* No different stores, two different stores.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

RH's expectation of petrol shop attendants is that they should be helpful. Therefore, his avoidance of *Mobil* is based on consistently poor service delivery across two separate stores. RH attributes the poor service to be the deliberate fault of the employee by suggesting that they are not 'willing' to help. Since RH did not mention any problems with the *Mobil* brand of petroleum, it is assumed that the product, in this case, fuel, functions well. However, owing to poor service, RH now makes a concerted effort to avoid the *Mobil* brand. Once again, this highlights the link between services and products in the poor performance sub theme.

3.1.1.2 Sub theme: Hassle factor

The second sub theme of interest involved incidents where an undelivered promise not only resulted in unmet expectations, but the subsequent negative experience was further compounded by an additional 'hassle', or added inconvenience.

In an attempt to manage or pre-empt failed product experiences, most companies offer money back guarantees or exchange policies (Firnstahl 1989; Folkes 1984; Heiman, McWilliams, and Zilberman 2001). However, previous literature posits that most dissatisfying consumption experiences result in some form of additional cost. Thus, in spite of guarantees and exchange policies, when a product fails there is an extra cost, which is added on top of the basic loss of benefits; this added cost is termed the 'hassle factor' (Firnstahl 1989). Examples might include the need to change mindset or behaviour, because the product has failed to work, or the investment of more time and effort when obtaining a refund or replacement (Heiman et al. 2001). When a consumer experiences hassle, merely replacing or refunding an unsatisfactory product is not enough to regain satisfaction (Firnstahl 1989).

Incidents of brand avoidance owing to hassle were observed in the current study. As illustrated by the excerpts below, offering a money back guarantee or replacing a faulty product was not enough to appease some of the consumers interviewed:

Some stuff I have bought from there [The Warehouse], it will go all right for a week or two, then something will go wrong with it and I don't really want the hassle of returning it. I just like to buy things that I think will last for a number of years rather than something that might break next week and you have to look at buying another one (*Interviewer: So what is it about the durability that's important for you?*) I guess just the hassle or having to go down and get another one... I guess I don't really go shopping that much, so I don't want to be going down there more than I have to.

SW Int 17 (Male, 24)

You wait in the queue, you buy the product, you think you've got a good deal, you go back, you test it out, something new, not second hand, you didn't get it from Cash Converters [well known pawn shop] or something and usually within half an hour you realise the problem and that's the hassle. You've got to go back again, wait in queue again to return it and explain to the person why it's not working, all for returning your money, your time is wasted for at least half an hour travelling and waiting in a queue, you could be there for an hour. If you don't include testing it you can say one and a half hours of my time that's half an hour of my time I'd rather be doing something constructive.

KL Int 11(Male, 20)

Unmet expectations caused by undelivered promises were, once again, an important component of the participants' accounts. Both SW and KL's comments reveal that new products are expected to last a certain amount of time and to function properly. However, compounding their negative consumption experiences, was the added time and energy required by both participants to obtain a refund or exchange a failed product. Refund policies are normally used by the company to reduce risk in a purchase decision (Heiman et al. 2001). As the quotes show, these policies are not able to achieve this effect for all consumers. In fact, some participants consider the inconvenience accompanying the exchange policies to be more costly than the benefit of a new product or refund. This finding corroborates previous literature exploring the topic of 'hassle' (Firnstahl 1989); however, this thesis also makes a new contribution to theory by positing that brands can be re-constructed in the minds of consumers to become indicators of 'hassle'. Thus, in the cases above, both participants avoid certain brands because the brand not only reminds them of an undelivered promise, but it now also acts as an indicator of additional inconvenience.

When you've bought something and it breaks, you take it back to get some after sales service and they don't really give a sh*t about you, so you kind of lose faith in that product and you don't buy it again... "Just take another one", "Oh just bring it back", I can't be bothered with that. I don't have time for that nonsense. I want to be able to buy something and

know it's going to work and if it costs a little more so be it... I hate domesticity... household stuff it's boring, I just want to get it in place, make sure everyone's happy and get on with my job, you know. I mean, it's like a multi part of my job to make sure the kettle doesn't blow up in six months time... I need to be secure and everything, stable... life's too short to muck around with mundane things like bloody toasters.

MS Int 5 (Female, 46)

While MS's excerpt also illustrates unmet expectations and the concept of 'hassle', her experience was more intense in affect than the previous two participants. When confronted with uncaring staff at the point of return, on top of the extra hassle, and a dissatisfying experience, her negative experience shifts from a failed product incident to something more personally insulting, as evidenced by her claims that customer service does not "really give a sh*t" about her. Schneider and Bowen (1999) conceptualise three consumer needs: justice, self-esteem, and security. According to Schneider and Bowen (1999), the violation of those needs may result in 'outrage', a term they define as being more severe than dissatisfaction. The poor performance and hassle factor experienced by MS led to a violation of her self-esteem and sense of security, which resulted in 'outrage' and subsequent brand avoidance.

A series of studies exploring the consumption experiences of working women and their 'juggling lifestyles' (Thompson 1996; Thompson 1997; Thompson et al. 1990; Thompson et al. 1994), may help to further inform MS's intense negative brand experience. Thompson's studies suggest that faulty products (and services) result in feelings of lost control and wasted time. By adding unnecessary complication and stress to his participants' lives, faulty products also make it more difficult for participants to fulfil their need of leading a balanced lifestyle (Thompson 1997).

To provide a context for MS, it is important to realise that a large part of her identity revolves around being a single working parent. Indeed, part of MS's brand avoidance is fuelled by the feeling that her limited time and resources are further wasted by the negative product experience. MS expects household appliances to function properly and be reliable. She also "hates" domesticity; thus, a failed product adds 'hassle' to her life in the form of unnecessary complication and instability. Where this thesis extends the work of Thompson and colleagues, is that while their research looked at products and services rather than brands; this thesis focuses on the role that the brand plays in this negative product experience.

MS purchases certain products from a retail brand with the expectation that they would function properly and make her life easier. When those expectations are

unmet, or promises undelivered, in MS's mind, the brand and its associated products became a symbol of an undelivered broken promise. Additionally, the brand also represents extra hassle to MS, hassle which MS feels she can do without. Therefore she avoids the brand because she is sure it will cause her more problems in the future.

3.1.1.3 Sub theme: Store environment

The third sub theme within the experiential brand avoidance was related to the store environment. There have been numerous studies of the physical environment of the store and its influence on the consumer (For example, Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, and Voss 2002; Bitner 1990; Bitner 1992; d'Astous 2000; Turley and Milliman 2000).

Baker et al. (2002) identify three key aspects of the store environment: ambient, social, and design components. Similarly, Bitner's (1992) work on servicescapes, or the physical surroundings of an organisation, suggests that customers are holistically influenced by three conditions within an organisation: ambience; layout and functionality; and sign, symbols, and artefacts. Based on a comprehensive review of atmospheric research, Turley and Milliman (2000) suggest that the environment of the store can influence approach-avoidance behaviours of consumers. Finally, d'Astous (2000) isolates 18 specific factors within the store environment that might make a shopping experience 'irritating':

- 1) Bad smell in the store.
- 2) Store is not clean.
- 3) Too hot inside the store or the shopping centre.
- 4) Music inside the store is too loud.
- 5) Unable to find what one needs.
- 6) Arrangement of store items has been changed.
- 7) Store is too small.
- 8) Directions within the store are inadequate.
- 9) No mirror in the dressing room.
- 10) Difficulty finding his/her way in a large shopping centre.
- 11) Crowding.

- 12) Turbulent kids around.
- 13) Being deceived by a salesperson.
- 14) Indifference of sales personnel.
- 15) High-pressure selling.
- 16) Negative attitude of sales personnel.
- 17) Sales personnel not listening to client's needs.
- 18) Unavailability of sales personnel.

Similarly, the qualitative data gathered in this thesis revealed that negative experiences within the store environment may also motivate brand avoidance:

The setting of the shop as well... there are some shops when you go in, you don't want to shop there because things are all over the place... I prefer a place where the counters are spacious, clear labels, comfort as you go in.

CK Int 7 (Female, 25)

The messy layout, unclear labels, and discomfort associated with the store environment contributes to CK's avoidance, while the unhygienic appearance, multitude of children, and unpleasant store environment motivates JH's avoidance of *McDonald's* and *KFC*:

McDonald's once again, unless it's a takeaway it's a fairly unpleasant place to eat, sort of quite cold and sterile, the same with KFC and they look quite dirty quite often, dodgy characters working behind the counter... you go in and everything's sort of plastic. You walk up, you order and you have to wait there for it and then you go and sit down, you get your little plastic tray and you don't know whether it's been cleaned, there's lots of little kids running around quite often and it doesn't really appeal to me when I'm eating.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

JH's statement is interesting because it illustrates the interplay between several brand avoidance constructs. Not only does JH have to wait for his 'fast food' (poor performance), but his negative *experience* of the store environment leads to a negative *perception* of the brand's products. JH continues by saying:

A lot of people eat in there, don't know whether it's just me, but they seem to be overweight sort of people, which once again reminds you shouldn't be eating it. (*Interviewer: So you're sitting there with your plastic tray, kids are running everywhere and there's fat people...*)and

you're wondering if the guy's spat in your hamburger or not, whether he washed his hands while he was doing all those sorts of things. The whole thing just... in part it is the health issue, in terms of what the people are doing behind there as well. How often do they wash their hands and they're handling hamburger, after hamburger, and how many times do they scratch their nose and everything in-between, I mean it's just realistic...

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

JH's quote was actually coded twice. Once in terms of a negative experience within the store's environment, and again with regards to the inadequate value of the brand, more specifically, deficit-value avoidance (discussed later). The coding of incidents across themes is acceptable practice when using qualitative data (Goulding 1998). His quote demonstrates that a negative store environment may also impact on the consumer's perception of the product brand. Owing to the unpleasant surroundings and type of customer present in the store brand, JH also perceives the product to be unhygienic and unhealthy. The relationship between these two themes highlights the importance of an integrative approach to studying brand avoidance.

Furthermore, because the brand promise of a pleasant eating environment is not delivered in JH's previous experiences, his re-constructed expectations of the store environment are no longer unmet. On the contrary, he expects that consumption experience within the store to be unpleasant, hence it is one of the reasons behind his brand avoidance. Thus, JH's case provides an important illustration of the transition between undelivered promises and re-constructed promises. This thesis argues that a brand promise only needs to be undelivered a few times, before the consumer stops expecting a positive brand promise, and begins to expect negative brand promises. In JH's case, the *McDonald's* and *KFC* brands are now promises of an unpleasant dining experience.

Therefore, this thesis contributes to theory by contending that distinct store environments are often associated with retail brands. These store environments may sometimes lead to negative experiences. Since brands are symbols of consistency, a negative experience within one store may result in a brand becoming re-constructed to represent a future indication of unpleasant store experiences. As a result, other shops that are associated with the brand name are avoided accordingly.

3.1.2 Summary of experiential avoidance

Experiential avoidance is derived from first hand incidents where the performance outcome of a brand falls below the consumer's expectations. These incidents begin

with an implicit or explicit brand promise. Brand promises can be implicit in the sense that they are socially constructed expectations of what an acceptable consumption experience is or isn't. Brand promises can also be explicit when the marketing of a brand creates certain expectations within the consumer. Undelivered brand promises result in unmet expectations, which cumulate in a negative consumption experience. Three sub themes emerged from the data (poor performance, hassle factor, and store environment) that help to illustrate some participants' negative consumption experiences. In all cases, the value constellation of the offending brand is reconstructed in the mind of the consumer to become a constant reminder of the undelivered brand promise and a symbol of a negative consumption experience. In some cases, the negative meaning associated with the brand is enough to lead to continual brand avoidance.

Overall, the findings discovered in this part of the thesis corroborate existing research in the area of negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction. In other words, unmet expectations and dissatisfactory consumption experiences do indeed motivate some incidents of brand avoidance. However, in addition to corroboration, this thesis also contributes to theory and advances the study of brand avoidance by incorporating the concept of the brand as an undelivered promise. More specifically, this thesis argues that undelivered promises lead to brand avoidance. This thesis further contends that in addition to the disconfirmation of expectations, to fully understand brand avoidance, other reasons must also be considered, and as the following sections will reveal, there are indeed many reasons that contribute to brand avoidance.

3.2 Identity Avoidance: Unappealing Promises

In the preceding section, the impact of negative consumption experiences on brand avoidance was discussed. Specifically, incidents in the qualitative data reveal that brand avoidance is sometimes motivated by undelivered promises and unmet expectations, which result in dissatisfaction with a brand. The emphasis there was on the *actual* consumption of the brand and the incidents that may lead participants to avoid the brand in the future. However, apart from dissatisfaction, other motivations are also expected to drive brand avoidance. 'Identity avoidance' was another type of brand avoidance that emerged from this thesis.

It is well established in the literature that an individual's self-concept is valuable to him or her (Hogg and Mitchell 1996). Self-esteem motivation suggests that people tend to behave in ways that will enhance their self-concept, and self-consistency motivation suggests that people will behave in a way that is consistent with their

perceptions of themselves (Sirgy 1982). Image congruence hypothesis posits that each person will behave in ways that are congruent with their existing self-concept, or in ways that will bring them closer to their ideal self (Dolich 1969; Graeff 1997; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Heath and Scott 1998; Hogg et al. 2000; Sirgy 1982). Similarly, individuals who identify or 'connect' with an organisation's identity are more likely to become members, and purchase the organisation's goods or services (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001).

Since brands consist of associations that make up a constellation of values or bundle of meanings, specific brands can be consumed to incorporate those meanings and values into a person's life. For instance, consumers tend to purchase brands that they construe to have a personality similar to their own (Aaker 1997). Thus, plenty of literature on symbolic consumption confirms the way in which brands and products can be used as symbols to add desired meaning or social value to an individual's life (Belk 1988; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; McCracken 1986; Sheth et al. 1991).

However, equally true is the premise that specific brands can also be avoided to reject the meanings, values and associations that a person does not want to include into his or her life. Some important studies have also addressed this notion of symbolic anti-consumption (Banister and Hogg 2004; Hogg and Banister 2001; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson et al. 2006; Wilk 1997a; Wilk 1994; Wilk 1997b). The main argument of those studies is that people define themselves not only by the things they consume, but also by the things they avoid consuming (Wilk 1997b).

Certainly, in this research, the qualitative data revealed that some participants were motivated to avoid brands perceived to be symbolically undesirable. This main theme of identity avoidance comprises the incidents where the symbolic meaning of the brand is perceived to be incompatible with the individual's identity, or self-concept. Thus, in this section, the emphasis is on the negative information received by consumers from external sources rather than first hand experience. This information may be in the form of advertising, packaging, media, word of mouth (WOM), and even the brand's stereotypical user; in other words, any source that communicates to the consumer a negative image of the brand (Keller 1993; Keller 1998; Park, Jaworski, and Macinnis 1986). Simply put, the consumer possesses a negative socially constructed perception of the brand that he or she does not wish to incorporate into his or her identity, thereby leading to brand avoidance.

With regards to the negative promises framework, this thesis contends that identity avoidance is motivated by the notion of symbolically 'unappealing promises'. The brand promises, or what the consumer perceives the brand to be delivering, is unappealing to the consumer. Thus, the main reason for incidents of identity avoidance is not unmet expectations and undelivered promises, but a mismatch between what certain brands signify and what the individual would like to incorporate into his or her identity.

As defined in the introduction, brands are bundle of meanings with the ability to alter the commercial value of a company's offerings. Brands are able to influence value by identifying and differentiating the products or services of one source from those of other origins. One important aim of branding is to indicate to the customer, before consumption, the additional benefits gained by the use of one brand over another. Benefits are usually communicated to the consumer in the form of functional, symbolic, and sometimes experiential associations (Keller 1993; Park et al. 1986). Appendix 2 (page 264) displays how brand associations have been traditionally classified into symbolic and functional associations. From a functional perspective, brands may assure 'quality' and 'reliability', and are designed to convey, to potential customers, 'lower risk' or better 'value' for money. A lack of functional value is another motivation for brand avoidance addressed later. From a symbolic perspective, a brand may differentiate itself from competitors by offering better ego enhancement ability, for instance the promise of 'prestige'; these symbolic benefits are the main focus of 'identity avoidance'. Finally, a brand could indicate an experiential benefit by promising a more 'exciting' or 'pleasurable' consumption experience to the potential consumer (Keller 1993).

In terms of experiential associations, the preceding section (experiential avoidance) established that it is possible for a brand to be perceived as a future indication of a negative consumption experience. For instance, when a brand is associated with an earlier negative experience, it indicates to the consumer that future experiences with that brand should be no different, and as a consequence the brand is avoided. Thus, the question of whether that brand avoidance is motivated by the perception of a negative future experience, or by the actual experience, must be addressed. In the present study, it was decided that such cases of brand avoidance were primarily motivated by previous negative consumption experiences rather than perceived future consequences. Thus, for this thesis, it is more appropriate to code the majority of these 'experience based perceptions' within the previous category of experiential

avoidance. As such, brand avoidance owing to negative experiential associations has already been addressed in experiential avoidance.

From an emic perspective, the category of 'identity avoidance' has emerged from a number of specific participant incidents. The sub themes: negative reference group, inauthenticity, and deindividuation remain closer to the data and help to illustrate the specific circumstances in which identity avoidance has occurred in this thesis's participants. The common defining property of the sub themes is that they all involve an unfavourable perception of the brand's symbolic values, a desire not to incorporate that negative meaning into the individual's identity, and subsequent brand avoidance. Thus, from an etic perspective, at the core of identity avoidance is the rejection of symbolically unappealing brand promises because of the potential that those negative promises have in moving the individual closer to an undesired self.

3.2.1 Main theme: Undesired self

The main theme, and concept, of 'undesired self' is the second major reason for brand avoidance. The undesired self consists of the associations and values with which the consumer does not want to be linked (Ogilvie 1987). It is proposed that the undesired self comprises actual memories, events, and emotions that make it a more concrete standard from which people can 'push' themselves away. In contrast, the ideal self comprises highly abstract and largely unobtainable aspirations, to which people can aspire, but never really attain. It has been posited that people may have a better idea of what they do not want to be, as opposed to what they wish to be. Thus, the 'push' away from the undesired self may be a more effective clinical tool than the 'pull' towards the ideal self (Ogilvie 1987). As a participant in a previous study of avoidance behaviour stated succinctly, "You can get away with not having a complete positive image by just completely avoiding the negative image" (Hogg and Banister 2001 p.94).

The concept of the undesired self has been investigated in consumer research , most typically in the area of self-image congruency theory (Banister and Hogg 2001; Banister and Hogg 2004; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Englis and Soloman 1997; Englis and Soloman 1995; Freitas, Kaiser, Chandler, Hall, Kim, and Hammidi 1997; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg et al. 2000; Hogg and Michell 1996; Hogg and Michell 1997; Lowrey, Englis, Shavitt, and Soloman 2001; Markus and Nurius 1986; Muniz and Hamer 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Patrick et al. 2002; Sirgy 1982; Wilk 1997b). The basic contention of

those studies, is that not only are consumers motivated to approach the ideal self and to maintain their actual self, but it is also important for them avoid the undesired self. Classic literature also gives examples of avoidance behaviours motivated by the undesired self, such as affluent women avoiding stores that use the term 'urgent sales', and teenagers who avoid products symbolic of family fun (Levy 1959). In the first case, affluent women may believe that only inferior people shop at sales; therefore the undesired self-concept of inferiority motivates the affluent to avoid such events. In the latter case, an aspect of the teenager's undesired self-concept may be the "inability to leave the family bosom"; thus, products that represent those undesired values are avoided (Levy 1959 p. 121).

However, literature investigating the link between specific *brands* and the undesired self is rare. The closest exploration has been the series of studies conducted by Banister and Hogg (2004), who investigate the role of undesired self and the avoidance of various product anti-constellations. Although few studies look at *brand* avoidance *per se*, the contention of studies in the area of self-image congruency may be logically applied. In other words, while brand-selection is based on construction of an ideal self, or the maintenance of the actual-self, through consumption of desired congruent brands, brand-avoidance involves consumers distancing themselves from their undesired selves by rejecting symbolically incongruent brands. This thesis contends that what makes a brand 'incongruent' is the negative meaning that takes the form of unappealing brand promises.

The concept of disidentification also helps to inform this study's analysis of the incidents pertaining to undesired self brand avoidance. 'Organisational disidentification', is similar to self-image congruency and asserts that people can develop their self-concept by disidentifying with organisations perceived to be inconsistent with their own image and values (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Therefore, undesired self is a self-concept or identity that the consumer does not wish to invoke (Ogilvie 1987). Self-image congruency is the notion that people seek to incorporate meanings that are congruent with their self-concept while avoiding meanings that are incongruent (Dolich 1969; Graeff 1997; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Heath and Scott 1998; Hogg et al. 2000; Sirgy 1982). Disidentification is the process by which the individual cognitively distances him or herself from an undesired identity (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Thus, one type of brand avoidance may be the rejection of brands perceived to represent undesirable values and unappealing promises.

In some cases of undesired self, the meaning of the brand may be unclear, which results in a discrepancy between the brand identity that the company was attempting to convey (Aaker 1996; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998), and the brand image that the consumer perceives (Keller 1993). In other cases, there may be reconstructed meaning. Here, the brand has been given additional meaning by the consumer, unfavourable meaning that was obviously not intended by the company but, nevertheless, impacts negatively on the consumer's behaviour and attitudes towards the brand. Lastly, there may be cases of brand avoidance that do not involve misinterpretation. In these incidents, the consumer correctly interprets the specific set of values that the brand signifies. However, the brand is still avoided because its value constellation is simply unappealing to the consumers, or incongruous with the individual's self-concept (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Hogg 1998; Hogg and Banister 2001; Hogg et al. 2000; Sirgy 1982). Whether there is misinterpretation of the company's brand communications or not, the following sub themes share an underlying motivation. Some consumers engage in brand avoidance because they do not wish to incorporate the symbolically unappealing promises that are associated with certain brands into their identities, since doing so would move them closer to their 'undesired selves'.

We always laugh about it, but we would never buy cheap toilet paper, because that just says something, you just think if you walk into a bathroom and there's cheap toilet paper... it says something about you, how you portray yourself... I guess it's important because that's how you see yourself. I'm not cheap and nasty. I think it's a reflection of my childhood as well, because I had three brothers and one sister so we're quite a big family... I mean having the budget stuff and I want to get away from that... you leave all that behind. (*Interviewer: So how does it make you feel when you can give your friends stuff that isn't Pam's, Basics, or stuff like that?*) I think it just makes you feel good, makes you feel like it's just nice, and it's real food and it tastes nice and it looks nice... I think you just feel good about yourself.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

This quote is a particularly salient example of the importance of symbolic anti-consumption and the participant's feelings of self worth, even with a product as trivial as toilet paper. In this particular example there is no misinterpretation of the brand by the consumer. Both *Pam's* and *Basics* are promoted as budget brands and SR understands the core values communicated by these brands. Thus, the avoidance is not due to SR's scepticism of the brand being able to deliver what it promises. Instead she simply chooses to disidentify with these brands because she does not wish to portray herself as being 'cheap and nasty' to her present friends.

Additionally, by avoiding the connotations of being 'budget', SR is able to distance herself away from an undesired self of the past, or in her own words to 'leave all that behind'. Thus, by avoiding a budget brand, SR avoids her undesired self. It is also interesting to note that although the brand is marketed as 'cheap' it most certainly would not have been purposely marketed as 'nasty'. However, in SR's mind, the two values have become bundled together and something which is considered 'cheap' is also considered, by her, to be 'nasty'. Thus, there is an element of re-construction that is responsible for SR's avoidance of *Pam's* and *Basics*.

In this thesis, a brand is a constellation of values. Thus, when a brand's values, including its promises, are associated with an individual's undesired self, he or she may be motivated to disidentify with that brand:

It's just not my style... [Amazon-surf/beach wear], I mean the style of clothing... they don't suit what I wear, my image, cause it's not like I'm going to go walking around in little tank top and a little 'whatever's in at the time', I don't have the body for it anymore... you know what I mean?... I'm married now I don't need to attract anyone anymore.

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

Similar to SR, there is no misinterpretation as to what the brand is attempting to communicate. Based on the socio-cultural context in which she exists, VL perceives that the brand's beach theme mainly targets teenagers; she also believes that the brand promises to deliver a certain look. VL simply chooses to avoid this particular brand since its ability to provide a young and flirty style is unappealing to the 'image' she is currently attempting to maintain.

3.2.1.1 Sub theme: Negative reference group

Social identity theory, posits that one important component of a person's identity is based on their group membership, and the meaning that group represents to the individual (Tajfel 1978; Hogg and Abrams 1998). Thus, people will try to maintain a positive social identity by associating with groups evaluated as being positive and disassociating with groups evaluated as negative.

The phenomenon of consumers developing their self-concepts by identifying with positive reference groups, while disidentifying with negative reference groups, is supported in academic literature (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Englis and Soloman 1995; Freitas et al. 1997; Muniz and Hamer 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Marketers often attempt to link their brand to aspirational/positive reference groups, the intention being that the target segment will choose to consume the brand

in order to close the gap between themselves and their aspirational reference groups (Soloman 2002). However, as the qualitative data from this research reveals, sometimes a brand can become linked with negative reference groups. When this occurs, some consumers may be motivated to avoid the brand since they wish to distance themselves from the negative reference group, and ultimately their undesired self.

In this study there is evidence of brand avoidance owing to the negative perception of a brand's stereotypical user:

When I started climbing regularly, I still didn't wear lots of t-shirts and all the clothes. Then you get the people that you knew definitely only climbed very irregularly. When you talked to them they'd tell you that they're climbers and they do this and do that, they'll have the t-shirts and bagfuls of equipment which they never use and that sort of stuff... in terms of the brand thing I guess it's quite specific... that sporting type of thing, people wearing the clothes I perceive that they're almost trying to pretend to be involved heavily in that sport, because they must feel that image is positive and gives them some sort of kudos or something... it might be just a shirt, but to deck yourself out you've got your billabong hat on and your billabong t-shirt and your something or other shorts, or surf shoes... and they'd never go to the beach or maybe surf twice in their life... That would be the same for a lot of different things... I don't feel the need to advertise I'm doing those sorts of things... I don't necessarily think it should impress me; it seems quite wanky... it just seems strange and a little bit desperate... Particularly in sports like surfing, climbing, maybe like martial arts... they make a desperate attempt to make sure everyone knows they've participated at some point, because they obviously think people are going to think better of them, impress them or something... I think it's just those sports that they perceive as being cool and popular... to give them a certain air of importance or make them seem dangerous or something... I think that people who have been doing things for longer... the people who do it the most and tend to be better at it, don't actually own a lot of that sort of stuff, and don't make a big effort to deck themselves out with all the equipment, or introduce themselves and in two seconds start talking about climbing, "it's on my t-shirt"... I think it's like a confidence sort of thing... once you get into it more, once you get past a stage you realise that the people who are beginners tend to be the ones who have all the gear and... that doesn't make them fit in at all, it makes them stand out as the beginner... so in their attempt to fit in by using all the grand stuff they actually stand out as not quite belonging... If they are doing it more regularly... all the stuff fades away and they fit in more naturally.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

This quote is a comprehensive explanation of an individual's avoidance due to the negative image associated with the stereotypical consumers of various sports brand.

Throughout his quote, JH's description of the people that use those sorts of brands is obviously negative and he is quick to disidentify from them in the opening sentence. The meaning of certain sports brands has been re-constructed in JH's mind to include the stereotypical users of the brand. For him, those brands and their value constellations now include a promise to make one user of the brand appear similar to other users of the brand. Since this promise is unappealing to JH, he avoids those sports brands accordingly. Given that this type of avoidance is based on re-constructed brand meaning, involving people that are external to the organisation, it may be that the company has less control of its brand image in these negative reference group scenarios.

Clearly, links may be drawn from negative reference group to the earlier theme of undesired self. A brand's value constellation includes the type of people who consume it. Thus, avoidance due to negative reference groups is still avoidance of the undesired self; hence the sub categorisation of this theme under the main theme of undesired self. However, despite the similarities, there is a small but important distinction between brand avoidance owing to undesired self and brand avoidance due to negative reference groups. In negative reference groups, brand avoidance is motivated by the unfavourable perception of the stereotypical users of the brand, and the negative meaning they add to the brand, rather than the negative meaning attributed to the brand on its own. In other words, the consumer does not wish to be associated with a negative reference group:

I remember in the 80's before I ever thought about Reebok shoes and I remember my dad always used to say that other people who wore them were just real 'try hards' and I remember that word being associated with them... but seriously I think people that wear that stuff are usually tossers, which is making a massive sweeping generalization, but people who cover themselves from head to foot in Nike are usually a little bit wanky... (*Interviewer: So what are some adjectives to describe the typical person?*) Yuppie, middle class wants to be upper class, sports obsessed but not necessarily sporty, like wanting a sporty image but not necessarily actually doing any exercise, people who'd rather be seen at the gym than actually doing any exercises that kind of thing, wanky, a bit of a poser yeah.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

It is KB's perception of the typical brand user and the unappealing promise of being like them, which motivates her brand avoidance, more so than the brand itself. From a broader perspective, her father's negative attitude towards the 'typical' consumer of *Nike* and *Reebok* has obviously influenced her perception of the brand's image. The

outcome is that the negative reference group that uses the brand and the brand itself come to share the same meaning for KB; therefore, it is unsurprising that she chooses to disidentify with those brands.

Literature on brand personality (Aaker 1997) asserts that consumers will prefer brands with personalities similar to, or compatible with, their own. This contention is similar to research on self-image congruency. Although Aaker (1997) does not study the negative aspects brand personality, in this study, the majority of associations used by KB and her father to describe *Nike* and *Reebok* consumers, and therefore the brand, are indeed negative. Thus, this thesis adds a new perspective to branding research by proposing the concept of negative brand personality. Since brands are evolving entities (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998), the stereotypical user of a brand is able to alter the consumer's perception of the brand's personality. When the brand is re-constructed to represent an unappealing personality type to a consumer, logically the individual will choose to avoid the brand.

In marketing itself to certain sub-cultures or segments of people, a company may automatically alienate itself from other consumers. From the company's perspective, this may be intentional. However, it is still useful for marketing managers to be aware of the negative perceptions some consumers may have towards their brand, even if those consumers are few in number and not part of the target segment. By monitoring the negative perceptions of consumers, marketing managers can remain informed of any potentially detrimental shifts in brand image.

3.2.1.2 Sub theme: *Inauthenticity*

Only brands that are construed to be authentic symbols of certain values, may be used to add desired meaning/values into consumers' lives. Authenticity is a concept which has been explored by most disciplines within the humanities. The search for authenticity has been investigated in tourism (Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973), art (Baugh 1988), museums (Goulding 2000; Goulding 1999b), wine (Beverland 2006), marketing (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Grayson and Shulman 2000; Kozinets 2002), and branding (Kates 2004; Thompson et al. 2006). In this thesis, lack of authenticity emerged as an important reason for brand avoidance.

The sub theme of 'inauthenticity' comprises the incidents where participants avoid brands that are perceived as fake. In other words, some brands are evaluated as not being able to deliver the associations that the brand was originally created to symbolise. This is different to the undelivered promises discussed in experiential

avoidance, since inauthenticity concerns the *perception* of a brand's inability to deliver desirable meaning, rather than a first hand *experience* of an unmet expectation.

The inauthenticity sub theme involves a gap between the participant's perception of the brand's image and the company's intended identity. The concept of consumer scepticism (Mohr, Eroglu, and Ellen 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 2000) may be used to inform this sub category, since the participant is sceptical of the brand's ability to truly represent what the company wishes to communicate. Subsequently, the brand's perceived inability to convey the desired symbolic values develops into an unappealing promise of phoniness, an undesirable trait that the individual may not want to incorporate into their identity.

I think you're buying into an image and you're saying this is my image when you are your own image, a brand is not your image. You don't own the brand it owns you kind of thing... I don't think that people need labels... I don't know who Calvin Klein is, but go him [good on him] for having his name on all those people's clothes... those t-shirts that say Calvin Klein on them and that people wear. Why would you wear somebody's name on you? I just don't get people doing that... I mean maybe if it's a tiny little label and it's on your shorts or something that's less bad, but I would never put on a t-shirt that said Calvin Klein, because I'm not Calvin Klein... If my name was Calvin Klein I'd probably wear it as a joke.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

KB cannot understand why some people would choose to label/promote themselves with another person's name/brand. From her perspective, each person is already authentic, but by labelling him or herself with a brand, the individual's identity becomes subsumed by the brand. Thus, instead of adding meaning through the use of brands, KB believes that the individual actually loses authenticity. A self-image created through brands is one that KB construes as being false and unappealing.

There are similarities between the KB's quote and those given in the previous sub theme of 'negative reference groups'. Certainly, some stereotypical users of a brand may be perceived as being 'fake' or inauthentic, which could lead to brand avoidance. However, the main difference between the two sub themes is that brand avoidance motivated by inauthenticity does not require the existence of a negative reference group. Inauthenticity is driven by scepticism towards the brand's image, its inability to enhance an individual's self-concept symbolically, and the unappealing brand promise of being fake. The excerpts below help to illustrate the differences between negative reference group and inauthenticity:

Although they may not be open as long as McDonald's, and not as convenient as McDonald's, there is just something about being able to go to the local fish and chip shop, have a chat with the guy, being relieved of the thought of seeing your food going along this process chain, being made up and basically slapped together.

MT Int 16 (Male, 42)

The quote suggests a discrepancy between the message the brand was originally designed to symbolise and the perceptions of the consumer. MT avoids *McDonald's* because he construes the brand's products as being over processed, artificial or fake; in other words, inauthentic. An obvious gap is highlighted between *McDonald's* intended brand identity (what the company believes it is promising) and the actual perception of its brand image (the unappealing promise that the brand now represents to MT). Additionally, unlike negative reference group, MT's avoidance is not based on a negative perception of the brand's stereotypical user; instead, he is purely sceptical of the brand and what it supposedly represents.

I tend avoid surfer brands because I don't actually think that wearing a Rip Curl top is going to make me into a surfer.

KD Int 6 (Female, 17)

Once again, there is no reference to an avoidance group. Instead, KD avoids wearing surfer brands simply because she realises that surfer brands do not turn people into surfers. *Rip Curl* is a surfing brand that utilises statements such as "A company built for and by surfers", and "*Rip Curl* will continue to stick by the grass roots that helped make us the market leader in surfing" (www.ripcurl.com). This company statement is a clear attempt to maintain the legitimacy (Kates 2004) and authenticity of the brand, which has, for the large part, been a key factor in the success of the company (estimated to be the second largest surfing manufacturer globally, after *Billabong* (Pech 2003)). However, KD is not a surfer and does not want to give the impression that she is trying to be a surfer by simply wearing surfer brands; therefore she disidentifies with that brand. Interestingly, although the brand is not viewed as inauthentic by KD, the prospect of wearing the brand is still unappealing to her, since it feels inauthentic for her to dress in *Rip Curl* clothing.

To be considered authentic and to maintain the association of authenticity is a difficult challenge for any brand (Thompson et al. 2006). Ironically, it appears that in some cases brands become too successful for their own good. Thus, an interesting paradox is observed; the more successfully a brand is marketed, the more acceptable/accessible it becomes to the masses. As a brand is used by people

outside the subculture in inauthentic ways, or is forced to engage in mass production to meet mainstream demand, its unique symbolism becomes diluted (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). The meaning which it conveys may also become intermingled with 'regular' consumers, resulting in the unintentional co-production of a new set of inappropriate values. Sporting brands are particularly prone to this dilemma, where non-hardcore members often use legitimate brands in an attempt to signify their participation in an activity (Wheaton 2000). The end result is a change of brand image and an avoidance of the brand by its original consumers. This avoidance occurs not only because the 'other' consumers may be seen in a negative light but also because of diluted brand image. As the brand loses the respect of its hard-core clientele, it may be labelled as ordinary or inauthentic. When consumers realise that the brand promise is 'fake', and therefore unappealing, and may no longer be used as a symbolic tool to add the desired meaning to their lives or identity, mainstream appeal may also be lost.

This phenomenon has been detailed most famously in Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry's (1989) seminal work on the sacred and the profane, specifically highlighted within the process of desecralisation. A comparable dilution effect was proposed again by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in their ethnography of the *Harley Davidson* subculture of consumption. Within tourism, a similar concept has been argued to affect popular holiday destinations. As a region's tourism industry becomes more successful, tour companies may often engage in 'staged authenticity', whereby customs and practices are over-exploited, and local inhabitants asked to 'act native'. Staged authenticity is designed to please the tourists. However, the commoditisation of the local culture sometimes results in its inauthentication and destruction, ironically, to the detriment of both the tourist and the local population (Cohen 1988; MacCannell 1973).

Typically, the commercialisation of any object may result in a reduction or loss of authenticity (Belk et al. 1989; Beverland 2006; Cohen 1988; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002; Thompson et al. 1994; Wheaton 2000). To be considered authentic or genuine there must be an impression of being close to the natural origin of something; 'the real thing'; a sense of originality, independence, and individuality (Baugh 1988; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Handler 1986). Thus, the more frequently an object or experience is replicated, or modified to satisfy the masses, the less authentic it becomes. Certainly, in this study, commercialisation has also been shown to result in perceptions of inauthenticity, disidentification, and subsequent brand avoidance. In addition to the evidence presented by the quotes

above, the notion of inauthenticity emerged early on in this research, as the second sensitisation interviewee mentioned that she avoided brands whose advertisements were perceived to be 'too deliberate'.

However, as some researchers point out, commoditised objects are still able to be authentic (Grayson and Shulman 2000). By acquiring new and appropriate meanings, objects are able to be re-authenticated. For instance, sacred objects may be 'revivified' or maintained by means of special rituals (Belk et al. 1989). A similar concept is 'emergent authenticity' which proposes that "it is possible for any new-fangled gimmick, which at one point appeared to be nothing more than a 'tourist trap,' to become over time, and under appropriate conditions, widely recognised as an 'authentic' manifestation of local culture" (Cohen 1988 p. 380). These theories seem to suggest that as something becomes a part of history it is perceived automatically as being more authentic; this transformation could explain the powerful use of nostalgia and heritage in retro-branding efforts (Brown, Sherry Jr., and Kozinets 2003).

These concepts indicate an interesting cycle. A brand is first created to act as a sign, symbolising added value for a product. At this early stage, the authenticity of the brand is crucial to its ability to convey a set of values. Too much success, over-marketing, and mass consumption causes the brand to lose some of its authenticity. In this thesis, the association of inauthenticity is enough to motivate brand avoidance in some consumers. However, if a consumer links a product or the brand with something of importance in their life, authenticity may be re-created (Grayson 1996; Grayson and Shulman 2000). In this way, though the brand remains inauthentic, the object is able to become sacred to the individual or an authentic reminder of a special experience. As a result, the new meaning associated with the object, though unique to the individual, comes to override the inauthenticity of the brand. Over time, if enough individuals come to share a similar experience of re-authentication, the brand may once again become authentic (Cohen 1988).

3.2.1.3 Sub theme: Deindividuation

The final sub theme coded under undesired self is 'deindividuation'. In these incidents, the brand is typically perceived to be 'mainstream', and thus, has been re-constructed in the mind of the consumer to represent an unappealing promise of deindividualisation. As a consequence, consumers feel that consumption of the brand may take away their sense of individuality and self-identity. This prospect is unappealing for some consumers, thereby motivating them to avoid such brands.

My sister bought some, she's had them for about two years and they are really great, so I don't think it's anything to do with the quality of them, it's just that every single person I know owns a pair of light blue Dickies... I don't see the point; I don't like wearing the same clothes that everyone else is wearing... I like to stand out. I think my sister is really into labels, she doesn't buy anything except for Amazon and I just look at her and her mates and they're all wearing exactly the same tops. They might be slightly variant but they're all Roxie tops or they've all got Billabong written on them somewhere... why be the same as everyone else when you can be different. (*Interviewer: Is she a little bit younger?*) Yeah, she's 14. Which is fair enough, I'm sure that every single 14 year old wants to fit in with their peer group, but I think as you get older you sort of think "I don't need to be identical to the rest of my friends why not be a bit different? You have your own self-confidence to create your own style rather than identifying with everyone else.

KD Int 6 (Female, 17)

As the number of people who wear a brand increases, the brand's ability as a tool to create a unique self-identity decreases. Since KD states that she likes to 'stand out' and dislikes the thought of being 'identical', she avoids the various brands that she construes as being 'mainstream'. KD also admits that it is not the functional quality of the brand that is a problem for her; rather, it is the symbolic meaning of being the same as everyone. Thus, once again, KD's undesired self influences her decision to avoid certain brands (Banister and Hogg 2004).

Also of interest, is KD's remark about the age of her sister and the need to develop an individual identity as a person grows older. Several participants reiterate this age-related concept of individuality, as they contrast their own behaviour with the 'clique' mentality of younger consumers:

I tend to avoid things that everyone else wears... I think Glasson's [Women's fashion store]... at least in New Zealand... functions so much around this mass production... they're the first ones and every little teenager girl gets their thing from there to be 'in', because everyone else is wearing the same thing. (*Interviewer: So why is that bad for you?*) Identity I think, I mean okay... not many people think about it, but I think it comes down to everyone wants to be different but you have the need to belong as well and maybe teenagers get that 'in' thing so that they belong to their clique. At the same time I think people have the need to be different; especially as you get older... it's not the same thing as a teenager. Although it's only superficial, to show that you're different, it's also a way to show that externally, that you're not one of those people that are victims to the fashion, what's 'in' and the 'latest' fashion, and because you want to look different.

JJ Int 4 (Female, 25)

I recognised that I wanted the stuff that my friends had... perhaps not so much as some people. I knew some of my friends who if one person bought something, the other person would buy something, I was never like that, but to a degree there were things that if my friends had then I'd want one similar and stuff like that, so I look back and recognise that. (*Interviewer: What do you think happens?*) You get your own individuality and you stop being that group clique... sometimes if you're in Queen Street you see the young girls there's like five of them and they've all got the same outfit on, I just think "Oh dear", it's really noticeable, they're like these clones that are all dressed in the same shoes and I just think... if somebody bought something, me going out and getting the same one, I would feel really weird about it.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

The value of having a unique self-identity is paramount to JJ's avoidance of *Glasson's*. She believes that the 'need to belong' is something important to teenagers but not to herself as a woman. Similarly, KB mentions that in her younger days she was more likely to want similar things as her friends, but as she grew older her need to develop her own sense of self became more pertinent. For the three participants above, being perceived as a 'clone' is an aspect of their undesired self and a brand that promises to make them look like everyone else is simply unappealing. Thus, by avoiding the brands they evaluate as being overused by other consumers they are able to maintain their individual identity and distance themselves from their undesired self.

Obvious links may be drawn between this sub theme (deindividuation) and the previous sub theme (inauthenticity). As mentioned earlier, authenticity and individuality are related concepts. The following quote helps to illustrate this link:

I like that kind of local feel to stuff. I love buying clothes where you can meet the people who have made them... I get all my rings and my jewellery off one guy who makes them. I've met this guy and I've talked to him... I really like being able to do that, to know where stuff comes from... I see his other stuff and he tells me about how he makes it... it's just more interesting than going to Michael Hill Jewellers [large company] and buying something that everyone else has got... I think that is probably a part of why I do avoid some of the big brands... It's just that you have a personal tie to it and then somehow it means something that's specific to you. I like stuff that does have some kind of meaning and a big brand that you kind of share, that has more of a shared meaning. (*Interviewer: By meaning you mean?*) Just being able to identify with something and being able to think about it a little bit more in terms of yourself.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

Once again, similar to the other incidents coded under identity avoidance, aspects of symbolic consumption (Belk 1988; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Hogg 1998; Hogg et al. 2000; McCracken 1986) are evident in KB's excerpt. She avoids 'big brands' as she does not wish to add 'shared' meaning into her life and because such brands do not represent her identity. Instead, KB prefers brands/products which are unique to her, and by consuming those brands she is able to add something more meaningful to her self-concept. Links to disidentification theory (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001) are also evident as KB finds it harder to identify with products that are not specifically made for her.

More importantly, the above case is good example of the multi-dimensional nature of brand avoidance. First, KB perceives *Michael Hill* as being less authentic than the local brands with which she has the opportunity to interact. However, this lack of authenticity is further compounded by the perception that consuming a mainstream brand may result in a loss of individuality. Deindividuation avoidance occurs when the brand is construed to be a symbol of identity loss, while inauthenticity results in brand avoidance because the brand is perceived to be a symbol of 'fake-ness'. Therefore KB's avoidance of Michael Hill is motivated more by her desire to not incorporate 'shared meaning' into her life, and to protect her sense of individuality, than by the perception that *Michael Hill* products are fake.

Nevertheless, each incident of brand avoidance may have multiple reasons, and as mentioned earlier, the more common an object becomes, the higher the likelihood of it being evaluated as being inauthentic. Hence these sub themes are grouped close to one another. Similarities may also be seen between deindividuation and negative reference group. However, in the former, a person avoids a brand to prevent a loss of individuality, while in the latter the participant practises brand avoidance so that he or she does not gain the associations of the negative reference group.

3.2.2 Summary of identity avoidance

Some participants are motivated to avoid certain brands because they perceive the brand promises to be symbolically unappealing. Specifically, participants engage in brand avoidance as a way of disidentifying with the negative symbolic associations that certain brands promise to deliver. The qualitative data revealed that undesirable symbolic associations could include negative reference groups, a lack of authenticity, or a loss of individuality. Therefore, three sub themes (negative reference group, inauthenticity, and deindividuation) were retained to help illustrate some specific cases of identity avoidance. However, in all cases, brands were avoided because of

their unappealing brand promises and the potential of those promises to move the individual towards his or her undesired self (main theme).

Sometimes the brand promise is interpreted in a way the company had originally intended, and avoidance is simply a matter of symbolic incongruence. At other times the brand promise may be interpreted in a manner not intended by the company. For instance, avoidance might be due to the negative meanings associated with the brand because of its stereotypical users, or scepticism of the brand's authenticity. In those cases there is an obvious gap between the message communicated by the company and the message interpreted by the consumer.

Overall, the findings discovered in this part of the thesis corroborate existing research in the area of self-image congruity. Like other consumers, the participants of this study were also motivated to maintain and enhance their self-concepts by avoiding various aspects of their undesired self. In addition, this thesis contributes to theory and advances the study of brand avoidance by incorporating the concept of a symbolically unappealing brand promise. More specifically, this thesis argues that it is possible for a brand promise to be negatively re-constructed in such a way that the brand is perceived, by the consumer, as something that has the potential to move the individual towards his or her undesired self. Consequently, the consumer disidentifies with the brand and its symbolically unappealing promise, and through the process of brand avoidance, the individual is able to manage his or her self-concept.

3.3 Deficit-value Avoidance: Inadequate Promises

The previous section discussed the impact of negative symbolic associations on the individual's desire to avoid a brand (identity avoidance). In contrast, this section on deficit-value avoidance explores the rejection of brands owing to a lack of functional value. Most academics distinguish between two types of consumer based brand benefits: functional and symbolic benefits (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Escalas 1997; Ligas 2000). Many terms are used to distinguish between functional and symbolic attributes, such as hedonic versus utilitarian, emotion versus reason, or tangible versus intangible. Generally, a brand benefit is considered to be functional if it helps to accomplish a task, or has utility. In contrast, symbolic brand benefits are used by consumers to express values, define their self-concepts, or display common understanding to others in society (Ligas 2000). Appendix 2 (page 264) displays how previous research has typically classified brand meanings into symbolic and functional associations.

Some scholars also add experiential benefits to the branding, such as the pleasure or exhilaration gained while consuming the brand (Keller 1993; Park et al. 1986). In terms of brand avoidance, this thesis contends that brand meanings can also be negative and therefore brands can be re-constructed to become indicators of negative symbolic, experiential, and functional associations. The former two have been addressed; this current section discusses the incidents of brand avoidance that are motivated by a lack of functional benefits or deficit-value.

With regards to the negative promises framework, deficit-value avoidance is motivated by the notion of 'value-inadequate promises'. Thus, deficit-value avoidance is not motivated by first hand experiences of undelivered promises that lead to unmet expectations, nor is it driven by symbolically unappealing promises that threaten to move the consumer closer to his or her undesired self. Instead, deficit-value avoidance is motivated by a perception that the brand promise is simply inadequate in terms of the individual's utilitarian requirements. Simply put, the brand is perceived to be deficient in value.

From an emic perspective, the sub themes: unfamiliarity, aesthetic insufficiency, and food favouritism, are interesting incidents that help to illustrate some specific circumstances in which participants have been motivated to avoid brands because of value inadequate brand promises. However, the common defining property of these sub themes is that they all involve an unfavourable perception of the brand's utility. Thus, from an etic perspective, at the core of deficit-value avoidance is the rejection of an inadequate brand promises because of the unacceptable trade-off that the brand represents to the participant.

3.3.1 Main theme: Unacceptable trade-off

Throughout interviews and coding, a frequent theme that emerged was brand avoidance motivated by the perception of a brand's inability to provide an adequate benefit to cost ratio; in other words, an 'unacceptable trade-off'.

(Interviewer: What sorts of things influence your purchase decisions?)
Value for money would be the highest. *(Interviewer: How do you define value for money?)* A 3L coke at a supermarket versus the same bottle at a local dairy, they will make more profit, so the value for money is at the supermarket, you get the same product for less. In terms of petrol, you get more mileage... per litre of petrol.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

RH's quote illustrates the cost to benefit trade-off; when purchasing the same product, RH perceives that he will need to pay more at a small store versus a large retail brand. The added cost, for the same benefit, means that RH associates a lack of value with small retail stores, and consequently avoids them.

In previous literature, brands are sometimes conceptualised as an indication of 'added value' to the consumer (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998), but what exactly does value mean? Value is defined as the evaluation of the utility of the product/service based on the benefits received relative to sacrifices given. Sacrifices might include time, money, effort, and search costs (Monroe and Chapman 1987; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Zeithaml 1988). Thus, a brand augments the value of a company's product or service when it promises the consumer more benefits for fewer sacrifices. The favourable reaction of the consumer towards this added value is the basis of consumer based brand equity (Aaker 1996; Keller 1993).³

Although the concepts of value and quality appear similar, some literature asserts that the two are different. Quality is an evaluation of the technical superiority or excellence of the product or service relative to other substitutes. Excellence is defined as the ability of the product or service to satisfy, meet, or exceed customer expectations (Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991; Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan 1998; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Parasuraman et al. 1985; Zeithaml 1988). Though perceived quality and value are usually related, perception of quality, in general, is more stable than perception of value. What a person finds valuable changes depending on the consumption situation, and even during the consumption process (Zeithaml 1988). In contrast, the perception of quality remains consistent across consumption situations; thus, although perceived quality could influence the perceived value of a product (Dodds et al. 1991), the two may also be independent of one another. In other words, high quality does not always translate to high value. To illustrate, a brand could be a signal of high quality (benefit); however, it may still be of little value to a consumer who does not wish to pay a high premium (sacrifice) (Zeithaml 1988).

³ 'Value' should not to be confused with 'values'. 'Value' (singular) is the trade-off between benefits and sacrifices and is usually related to a transaction (Monroe and Chapman 1987; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Zeithaml 1988). 'Values' (plural) is related to ingrained consumer beliefs of what is moral, good or bad, right or wrong (Holbrook 2002; Payne and Holt 2000; Wooddruff 1997). Although a person's 'values' will invariable influence what they 'value' (or find valuable), the term 'value' (cost versus benefits) is more pertinent to this discussion of deficit-value avoidance.

From a wider socio-historical perspective, the concepts of value and quality are both socially constructed phenomenon. In terms of quality, the consumer's judgement of the 'excellence' is a relative comparison, and is based on his or her knowledge regarding the performance of other products. Similarly, what a person defines as a cost and a benefit are also based on the social context in which he or she exists. Lastly, the individual's assessment of the trade-off between cost and benefit is also based on the wider norms with which he or she is familiar. For instance, a person who evaluates a low price and high benefit trade-off as being superior in value is basing his or her evaluation on wider norms. The established social understanding of the time suggests that high benefits are not normally accessible unless costs are also high; thus, the trade-off (high benefits for low cost) that this person has managed to secure, is superior in value because the societal norm is that such trade-offs are rare. Similarly, a person who assesses a trade-off involving high price for low benefits as being 'unacceptable' is also basing his or her assessment on their cultural understanding that, normally, high prices should not result in low benefits.

As expected, within the main theme of unacceptable trade-off, some participants avoid budget brands that they construe to be of low quality and, consequently, low value. Thus, even though budget brands offer a price that is considerably cheaper than premium brands, the benefit that budget brands provide (low price), is still not enough to offset the cost of low quality.

I don't go for the real cheap stuff, so I suppose I do avoid them, like ... No Frills and Basics... if it's real cheap then I don't place much value on it because if it's real cheap then it means that it doesn't cost much to make and it's usually inferior... I just get the perception that you put a price on something as to what you perceive its value is, so if you've got it real cheap and it's always real cheap then the value that you're putting on it is real cheap.

SP Int 18 (Male, 26)

I don't necessarily think cheap is going to be bad, but I do associate The Warehouse as being cheap and nasty. (*Interviewer: How do you mean nasty?*) Just badly made, don't fit very well, a lot of the stuff's uglier I guess... If I spent more money, I would expect it to, I would perceive it as being more, of better quality, will last longer, probably better support...

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

It doesn't matter that it's much cheaper [Asda and No Frills], it's what you get for it, it's worth that money, so you don't get any value for money. You do get value for money if you buy the more expensive brand. It's worth it, to spend that extra... you're paying less but at the same time you get low quality. You pay more but you get higher quality for it, so it's

almost I would say 'proportional', that's what you can expect, to pay more, but you get better quality.

JJ Int 3 (Female, 25)

The quotes above illustrate the trade-offs that consumers make with regards to perceived value. SP, JH, and JJ all believe that cost and quality are 'proportional', so low cost brands are perceived to provide low quality products, while high cost brands are 'expected' to deliver high quality products. Consequently, the three participants avoid budget brands because they place a lower value on the trade-off provided by budget brands (low cost for low quality) than on the trade-off provided by premium brands (high cost for higher quality). Thus, their choice to avoid budget brands is primarily based on their assessment of the trade off between benefits and sacrifices as being unacceptable.

In contrast, other participants perceive budget brands to be of higher value. These consumers perceive a minimal difference between the quality of premium and budget brands. As a result they feel that obtaining a product of comparable quality for low cost is a more valuable trade-off for them than gaining a high quality product for high cost. Although the following two incidents are not examples of brand avoidance they do help to clarify the difference between value and quality:

I buy Signature range [large retailer's private brand], all those Budget things... especially for things like pasta... there is a compromise between quality and price, you do pay for what you get in certain circumstances, but there are certain staple foods like rice which you know is not really going to change.

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

I know for a fact from some holiday work I did many years ago... in a soap factory there was some soap coming along the production line and they had two packaging machines, one for No Frills, one for Lux, both exactly the same soaps... one was basically double the price of the other... from my own experience, I'd say probably three quarters of No Frills, Budget, you can find an equivalent brand from the shelf and you can actually match them up from the codes on the bottom of tins... So I definitely pursue that and if I see a No Frills and it's the same as a branded product, I will always buy the No Frills.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

Both VL and DS have considerable brand knowledge pertaining to the production process of those product brands; thus, they construe budget brands to be of equal quality to premium brands. Since the cost of budget brands is lower than premium

brands, VL and DS believe the value trade-off is actually better for budget brands. As a result, they do not avoid budget brands in the way other participants have.

Also of interest are participants who purposely avoid premium brands. Some participants perceive premium brands such as *Sony* and *Nike* to be of high quality when compared to cheaper brands. However, these participants also judge the high cost of premium brands as being an unacceptable trade-off. Thus, for some participants, the brand is still considered to be of low value despite the associations of high quality. As a consequence, the brand promise is still considered value inadequate, and the brand is avoided accordingly.

Sometimes I feel you pay that much just to get the status... 'Oh it's a Sony'... the quality will most likely be the same, but the money we've added doesn't really give you anything, it's just extra profit.

KL Int 11 (Male, 20)

KL avoids *Sony* because it is perceived to be deficient in value. Since the symbolic benefit of 'status' appears to be of little value to KL, the extra cost associated with a *Sony* product is not perceived to add any tangible benefits to the purchase. Instead, the extra cost is only perceived to add 'extra profit' to the company.

I buy most of my clothes there [Warehouse] because I need to preserve my money for more important things like food and rent and we've also outgrown the need to wear designer labels... first and foremost I don't have the money, and maturity and wisdom has sort of influenced my decisions I guess and prioritising things that are important in life... I'm as good as anybody else whether I'm wearing Gucci or Garage, a universal brand at The Warehouse. It's proven itself time and time again... my peers, I might be dropping the kids to school or something, "Oh you look nice today"... they'll be wearing Jean Jones or Saks... that bullsh*t, you know... To me people are important, not what they wear... I would have and I did... in the past when I had money and when I had the choice, but being on the poverty line now for about five or six years, I've learnt so much more and it's not important to me... I know that I can go and buy a suit from Shanton and look a million dollars and it will cost me \$70, whereas an acquaintance might go into Smith and Caughey and buy David Pond which costs \$700 and achieve the same result. I'd rather have the money to pay for the service of the car or food on the table or to make sure the rent is up to date.

MS Int 5 (Female, 46)

Apart from simply not being able to afford status branded clothing, MS also suggests that she has 'outgrown' the need to wear designer labels and has learnt to 'prioritise' the 'important things in life'. Although, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not her attitudes would still remain the same if her financial circumstances changed, her

opinion, for the time being, is that premium brands are value deficient. In other words, she assesses the trade-off provided by premium brands such as *Gucci* (very high cost for standard benefits) as being unacceptable. As far as MS is concerned, lower tier brands cost less but provide similar benefits; therefore, she perceives the brand promise of premium brands to be value inadequate.

Country road [upper class clothing brand], I perceive them to be overpriced... and also I don't perceive what they make to be good value. (Interviewer: What you mean by good value?) Spec for your cheque I guess, performance and dollar value, as in how well the stuff lasts. If it's clothing, whether it performs, durability... if they're shoes, if they support your foot any better than the cheaper brand or the looks.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

Similarly, AP avoids *Country Road* because of the unacceptable trade-off he associates with the brand. For him, the benefits provided by the brand are not great enough to justify its high price. The second half of the quote above also suggests that perceptions of value are based on a comparison between various brands across the price spectrum. Thus, like other participants, AP believes that a premium brand is expected to perform better than a cheaper brand; however, *Country Road*, though costing more, does not match his belief.

A wallet, it stays in your pocket for most of the time, so why do you need to buy Louis Vuitton, when other wallets serve the same function?

JL Int 20 (Male, 26)

For JL, the value of a wallet is in its functional capability. Given that a wallet remains hidden from public view most of the time, a brand that offers a symbolic benefit is simply unnecessary in his opinion; especially since other wallets that cost less are also able to fulfil the 'same function'. Therefore, the value trade-off that is promised by the brand, in this case, high cost for high prestige, is still perceived to be unacceptable for JL.

An important function of brands is their ability to act as signals of reduced risk, and therefore, higher value. Brands are considered 'credible' when their companies are perceived by consumers to be willing and able to deliver on promises. Thus, well managed brands are valuable to their companies because they may be perceived by consumers to be a higher quality and lower risk option; in other words, a better trade-off when compared to competitors. 'Credible' brands also save the consumer time and cognitive effort in terms of information search and decision making, especially under conditions of uncertainty (Erdem and Swait 2004; Erdem et al. 2006). With

regards to this thesis of brand avoidance, a reverse effect has occurred. Some participants are sceptical of premium brands and their ability and/or willingness to deliver on certain brand promises. Therefore, these brands may actually act as signals of decreased value. The brand has been re-constructed in the mind of the consumer to represent a lack of functional value. The above participants: KL, MS, AP, and JL display traces of consumer scepticism (Mohr et al. 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 2000). None of them believe that any additional value is provided by the extra cost of the premium brands. Thus, for them, premium brands are not always believed to be 'credible' and, as a consequence, the associated brand promises are perceived to be value inadequate.

3.3.1.1 Sub theme: Unfamiliarity

The preceding section concluded with some cases involving the avoidance of well-known premium brands. Those brands were avoided because the high cost associated with premium brands sometimes resulted in perceptions of an unacceptable trade-off. In this section, a contrasting reason for deficit-value avoidance is explored. Grounded theory analysis of the qualitative data suggests that a lack of brand familiarity may also contribute to perceptions of an unacceptable trade-off.

Brand awareness is asserted as an important component of consumer based brand equity (Keller 1993). The benefits a brand gains from being easily recognised or recalled by a consumer are well known (Aaker 1996; Holden 1993; Keller 1993; Keller 1998). Heightened awareness leads to familiarity with the brand, which, usually, leads to liking and increased probability of a brand being placed into the consumer's consideration set (Aaker 1996). The familiarity of a brand name is a function of market share, the age of the brand, and advertising volume (Bogart and Lehman 1973). In situations of low involvement processing, brand awareness has been shown as a dominant cue regarding purchase intention and judgments of quality (Hoyer and Brown 1990; Macdonald and Sharp 2000), and may even reduce the impact of negative information (Ahluwalia 2002).

Logically, a consumer may construe an unfamiliar brand as having a poor cost to benefit ratio and, therefore, evaluate it as being an unacceptable trade-off. The quotes below illustrate the incidents where a lack of familiarity has resulted in the perception of value inadequacy, with regards to the brand promise:

I tend to stick to the big name type brands for the most part. So it's easier to pick out the little funny named things which I've never heard of before

and no one else has ever heard of, so I guess that's where the advertising pays off... I mean if I don't know anything about it, I'm less likely to buy it, which I guess is the whole reason why I tend to go [for] the big brand things, at least I know a bit about them, they've got plenty of information on them and it's available, where they come from, who makes them, plenty of support, updates, going to be able to get them easily, pretty common, people can fix the things quite easily. If it's something no one's ever heard of and something goes wrong with it, then it's harder to get fixed or parts.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

The main reason why JH and other participants avoid unfamiliar brands is because of the relationship between familiarity, quality, and risk (Richardson, Jain, and Dick 1996). An unfamiliar brand is perceived to be of lower quality and higher risk, in other words, a trade-off that is deficient in value. JH is reluctant to buy a 'funny named' brand which he construes as being more difficult to repair and service, as well as having less support and information. Hence, the brand promise of unfamiliar brands is perceived to be inadequate for JH's functional requirements.

It was also observed that deficit-value avoidance motivated by unfamiliarity, was usually accompanied by the preference/loyalty towards a more familiar brand:

You tend to know what you prefer in terms of quality and value for money and then you know what the brands are by talking to other people as well and by trying them out yourself, so you'll go for one you know... a service such as Gull, for example, comes into the picture. I'm somewhat apprehensive about trying it, simply because they're not a brand name, they're a local family owned service station provider, so I doubt the service, it's not widely known yet... Yes I would tend to avoid, because I don't know what the quality of the product is. Even though they might be cheaper or around the same price as what I already know, I would tend to go for what I already know.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

The link between unfamiliarity and perceived quality is evident in RH's quote. He avoids *Gull* because of its unfamiliarity to him, and simultaneously opts for brands with which he 'already knows'.

In addition to perceptions of value, another effect that brand familiarity has on participants is its ability to convince consumers to try the brand in the first place:

I avoid anything that I'm not really familiar with and most of the times that's the cheap stuff that they sell at The Warehouse. (*Interviewer: What is it about familiarity?*) You've got the service, you're used to, the type of things that they actually do when you go in there, you know what to expect... if I'm familiar with something, I know I can trust that particular

brand to actually serve my needs (*Interviewer: How do you know that the quality in a store that you're not familiar with isn't just as good?*) [if] I haven't seen anything like that on TV, the radio, or even any of the flyers in newspapers, it hasn't created a conscious image, so [that] you can actually say "Okay let's go and try it out, according to this advertisement here, or what I've seen on TV they're actually quite a good brand"... I've got no awareness. (*Interviewer: When you see ads on TV what do you think of them, or any advertising that raises your awareness?*) I think "Oh yeah, that sounds pretty good, maybe I should go and check it out", but it's not that I rush out tomorrow and check it out. I eventually will get there, but when I see it it's like "Oh so that's what they were saying on TV about this store, okay so this is the store", then I'll go in and have a look and actually see for myself whether what they advertised on TV equals what they have in store.

MO Int 19 (Female, 31)

MO raises two points with regards to brand avoidance caused by unfamiliarity. First, she avoids brands which are unfamiliar because she perceives them to be unreliable; this is a typical case of unacceptable trade-off. Second, unfamiliar brands are also less likely to be trialled in the first place. This problem is similar to the 'double jeopardy' dilemma, which affects brands that have a smaller market share. The assertion is that a brand with a small market share not only has fewer sales (because it has a smaller market) but is also likely to be bought less often than larger brands (Ehrenberg, Goodhardt, and Barwise 1990). Thus, in relation to this thesis, an unfamiliar brand may be construed to be unacceptable trade-off (owing to a perception of value deficiency) and are subsequently avoided for their value inadequate brand promises. Additionally, because of reduced brand awareness unfamiliar brands are also selected less by consumers, and as a result are not given the opportunity to display their potential strengths.

3.3.1.2 Sub theme: Aesthetic insufficiency

'Aesthetic insufficiency' is an interesting sub theme of unacceptable trade-off. In this sub theme, participants avoided the brand because of the value inadequate promises conveyed by the brand's non-product related attributes or extrinsic cues (Keller 1993; Richardson et al. 1996). In particular, informants perceived a lack of value with the packaging, colour scheme, and/or other superficial aspects of aestheticism associated with the brand:

No Frills... they are white and blue, or white and black... I don't know, it's not very appealing, like in Watties [premium brand] you can see the baked beans and stuff on the side of the thing, but No Frills, suits the name... you can already predict the quality from what you see on the

outside, cause they haven't spent, I know it's got nothing to do with it, the quality of the thing inside, but to me... if you're going to sell your brand.

MO Int 19 (Female, 31)

A basic interpretation of MO's statement, suggests that she avoids the budget brand because she finds the appearance of the packaging unappealing; therefore this incident could also be coded under identity avoidance. However, a more interesting contradiction also emerged from her excerpt. MO is not sure whether or not the packaging could be used as an indicator of quality. Although she 'knows' the packaging has nothing to do with the quality of the product, to some extent, the aesthetic insufficiency of *No Frills* does make her question the value of the brand's product. She tentatively suggests that the effort a company puts into selling the brand may be an indicator of quality. Thus, for MO, a brand that invests effort into its aesthetics is valued over a brand that has not put in a similar investment.

Similarly, other participants also acknowledge that although packaging played a minimal role in the quality or performance of most products, they still chose to avoid brands perceived as unattractive:

I would never avoid a brand because of its packaging, but when it's sitting side by side on the shelf, sometimes the packaging does appeal to the eye and the interest, you'd rather go up and look at it. I think I'd buy it rather than another brand with no packaging, for example Budget or the Basic where the packaging is very basic.

KL Int 11 (Male, 20)

KL begins by asserting that he would never avoid a brand due to aesthetic insufficiency, but then he admits to the drawing power of 'fancy' packaging. Previous research also corroborates the negative influence of poor packaging on consumers' attitudes towards budget/private brands. Consumers often perceive private brands as being inferior because of the low cost and plain packaging (Richardson et al. 1996; Sivakumar and Raj 1997). From a wider socio-cultural perspective, much value is placed on aesthetic beauty in society and the halo effect of beauty is well known. Marketers use fancy packaging and attractive models in their promotional campaigns in the hope that the positive connotations people have of 'things that look nice' will 'rub-off' on the product (Belch and Belch 2004; Chitty, Barker, and Shimp 2005; Soloman 2002). Simply put, from a functional perspective, beauty inspires confidence, while aesthetic insufficiency does the opposite. As the quotation below illustrates, the halo effect of aesthetics persists even when the individual thinks that the link may not be logical:

It just conjures up in my mind, that it's something that's cheap and nasty its not nice, I mean the packaging it's just not nice, it's just the whole thing, just don't like it (*Interviewer: What would be a nice, not cheap sort of thing?*) I think of sugar like Chelsea sugar, and I tend to go for Cadbury... things that are well known, better, stood the test of time, quality... sometimes I think it's the same thing but it's just that the packaging looks nicer. You know how Countdown and places like that they do their own kind of branding? I'm sure sometimes it's the same thing. (*Interviewer: That's interesting, you feel it's the same thing but you still rather go for the one that's a little bit more expensive?*) I know it sounds hopeless, but it's because I know it just looks nicer, so I want it to look nice (*Interviewer: Do you think the quality's any different?*) You have to think whether you're getting the same thing or not, because if you're getting the same thing, then obviously the quality's the same. I mean in some things I think they're the same but in some things I don't think they are.

SR Int 2 (Female, 40)

SR avoids 'cheap and nasty' packaging in order to distance herself from undesirable associations; thus, for her, the brand promise is 'unappealing'. This aspect of aesthetic insufficiency is related to the undesired self and the process of identity avoidance discussed earlier. However, SR also perceives the brand promise, or aesthetically insufficient brands to be value inadequate; this relationship, between aesthetics and value, is evident when she suggests that sometimes the product in fancy versus plain packaging may not be the same. In those cases aesthetic insufficiency may be used as a predictor of low quality, or a lack of value. SR also acknowledges the irony of her behaviour. She even suggests that her reasoning 'sounds hopeless', since she suspects that in some cases there may be little difference in quality between a plainly packaged brand and one that is more aesthetically pleasing. However, she justifies her behaviour by suggesting that sometimes she just wants things that "look nice". Perhaps SR, and some of the participants above, simply values attractive packaging over unattractive packaging.

Overall, many consumers use the aesthetic appearance of a brand as an indicator of functional value. Thus, in some cases, aesthetic value is a means to an end, and some participants avoid brands that are perceived to be aesthetically insufficient because it signifies low quality, which, for them, translates to an unacceptable trade-off. These participants lack confidence in aesthetically insufficient brands and perceive those brands to be value inadequate in terms of their ability to satisfy the individual's functional requirements.

In other cases, 'aesthetic insufficiency' itself is the reason for avoidance. Some participants avoid aesthetically insufficient brands because aesthetic value is sought as an end in itself. Thus, some participants simply perceive brands lacking in aesthetic value to be an inadequate offering.

3.3.1.3 Sub theme: Food favouritism

Another interesting sub theme to emerge was food favouritism, or the preferential treatment of food compared to other non-consumables.

The study of consumer's attitudes and behaviour towards food is a well researched and vast area (*Trends in Food Science and Technology; British Food Journal; Journal of Food Quality; Journal of Food Safety; Journal of Food and Culture; Food Quality and Preference; Journal of Food Products Marketing*). However, only specific incidents pertaining to the perception of value are of relevance in this thesis. The data gathered in this research reveals that food occupies a special place within the consumer's mindset when it comes to considering the trade-off between sacrifices and benefits:

Especially with food, this is something very sensitive, because consuming foods it gets into yourself, it becomes part of yourself, and they say you are what you eat, and food, you become what you're eating, this has this subconscious meaning, as well.

LB Int 1 (Female, 52)

LB's statement illustrates the connection between the individual and food; for her, food literally becomes part of the consumer. The quote below reiterates the importance of food versus other products such as clothing:

I mean your clothes you wear, but food you actually take in, so it's to do with health as well, whereas clothes, you know, it doesn't really matter for me... something can look nice and... it's not necessarily a big brand, whereas with food you intake it, so it's really tied to health for me, so you can't really compromise with that.

JJ Int 3 (Female, 25)

Of particular interest, are incidents where participants avoid food products of a certain brand, but continue to simultaneously purchase the non-consumables of the same brand:

Unless it was something that didn't really matter. Like sometimes I do buy the Pam's paper towels because they're cheaper and you're not eating it. It doesn't matter. (*Interviewer: So what's the distinction between stuff you eat and stuff you don't eat?*) Well that's the only thing I would buy of

Pam's because they're about half the price of the other ones but they do the same job. So generally [I] just don't buy them at all, but sometimes, things like paper towels are things that you're just going to chuck out.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

SR avoids most products from *Pam's* (a budget brand) but will, sometimes, purchase *Pam's* paper towels because they do not 'matter' to her, since they are a non-consumable product. This inconsistency is interesting because a brand promise that is adequate for some products suddenly becomes inadequate when food is concerned. This point is highlighted by another participant:

Low budget brands... I would buy like pet food and toilet rolls, but when it came to food I wouldn't buy cheap, I'd go for maybe the slightly higher price... probably down to health... I'd assume there would probably be more sugar, maybe more fat... If you went with a No Frills sausage you'd get what you pay for, you pay next to nothing for them so you wouldn't expect them to be great sausages... If you're saving and you're on a very tight budget, say, a single mother with three or four kids, you're going to buy No Frills... everyone's going to be happy. But at our age and I don't think there's any reason why you should scrimp and save on things like food... I'd be quite happy to spend to get the best I can afford. (*Interviewer: And that's mainly linked to health?*) Health also enjoyment as well... because eating is an enjoyable thing... it's a pastime almost, and if you've got the money to spend that little bit more on better food you're going to enjoy it a little bit more and you're going to feel better for it. Whereas if you have a fairly cheap meal, you can survive but you're not going to feel too good afterwards and it won't be much of an enjoyable experience, so I suppose that comes down to taste and texture, lack of fat, you can tell fat from a mile away can't you?

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

In AR's mind, the *No Frills* brand promise (lower quality for a cheap price) is adequate for certain products, but inadequate for food. The preference to pay more for food is apparent in AR's quote. He willingly purchases toilet rolls and pet food from the budget brand, but avoids purchasing his own food from the same brand. One reason is the enjoyment he attaches to food, while his second reason is the perception that food will directly affect his health.

The favouritism with which participants approach their food-related consumption decisions may be related to the impact food has on an individual's wellbeing. Research on perceptions of food and safety suggest that when it comes to decisions regarding food choice people are more likely to be cautious and use 'better safe than sorry' cues, centred around avoidance of the unfamiliar, contaminated, cheap, or

harmful (Green, Draper, and Dowler 2003; Occhipinti and Siegal 1994). Such research helps to explain why value deficient brand promises were more likely to be perceived as unacceptable when related to food, while the same brand promise was deemed to be acceptable when it was related to other 'less important' products.

There is a perception that budget/private brands are of lower quality (Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent 2000; Richardson et al. 1996; Sivakumar and Raj 1997). In this thesis, a lack of quality with regards to food, translates into perceptions of less nutrition or safety, and is the main reason why some participants avoid foods from budget brands. With regards to the main theme of unacceptable trade-off, participants believe that the sacrifice of losing their health, due to low quality food, is more concerning than the benefit of saving money, through purchasing cheap food brands. Non-consumables, on the other hand, are judged by some participants as having less impact on their health; thus, a more lenient approach is adopted when purchasing these products.

Of the participants who displayed 'food favouritism', the majority were sceptical of *McDonald's* functional ability to provide healthy food of high quality, thus, most mentioned *McDonald's* as a brand they would avoid for health reasons. Ironically, *McDonald's* is a highly successful brand that has consistently emphasised a good value for money trade-off, by promoting the message of high quality food at a reasonable price. However, only two of the participants interviewed felt that the quality of food from *McDonald's* was of adequate standard. One preferred *McDonald's* to a local Chinese take-away restaurant, and the other stated that in Africa, *McDonald's* was much better than some local eateries:

When you're in Africa and all you've had is zebra or something and you see a McDonald's sign, and that's all they have over there, they haven't got KFC or anything like, you just think you're in heaven. It truly is the 'golden arches', you know what I mean?

KH Sensitisation Int 3 (Female, 28)

KH's quote refers to an extraordinary circumstance. In general, however, the majority of participants associated the *McDonald's* brand with unhealthy, low quality, value deficient food, and avoided the brand because of its inadequate promise:

That's just generally because I don't like it [McDonald's], I sort of think it's fat and unhealthy... there's better things I can be doing to myself than that.

KD Int 6 (Female, 17)

The whole mass production of fast food, it manages to lower the price, I agree with that, but at the same time they're also, like anything that is mass produced, it is shit... I worked for Auckland Diabetes for a long time as a volunteer... McDonald's had put out a leaflet basically saying their food was perfectly compatible for some of the diabetics and it was just complete nonsense... In that Mc libel case... their head nutrition fellow was arguing that McDonald's food was full of nourishment and nutrients, the other lawyer said "You've given a rather interesting definition of nutrition. By your definition, a piece of wood would also be nourishing" to which the McDonald's guy replied, "Yes that's correct."

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

DS's opinion highlights an unacceptable trade-off between the gains of saving money and the loss of health. In general, throughout the theme, unacceptable trade-off, the preservation of financial resources is a large contributor to brand avoidance, as some participants try to save money by avoiding over-priced brands. In contrast, when food is involved, the emphasis shifts from saving money to maintaining health. These attitudes might be attributable to the individual's social constructions of food safety and health, where food may be considered with more caution by people in general (Green et al. 2003; Knox 2000; Occhipinti and Siegal 1994).

Evident throughout the sub theme of 'perceived health risk' is the social construction of *McDonald's* as being unhealthy. However, the many quotes illustrating consumer avoidance of *McDonald's* does not constitute evidence of *McDonald's* inevitable failure. The comments above should not be taken as definite predictors of the participants' behaviours, since there are often contradictions between what consumers intend to do and their actual behaviour.

Nor should these quotes be generalised to other segments of the population, since the meaning attached to *McDonald's* by its main clientele may be different from this study's participants. Thus, whether that brand is *McDonald's*, *No Frills*, or *KFC* does not matter in this grounded theory analysis; what is important is the theoretical supposition that consumers are more likely to avoid brands that they construe as being a risk to their health.

3.3.2 Summary of deficit-value avoidance

Deficit-value avoidance occurs when consumers decide that a brand is lacking in value (value is defined as the trade-off between benefits and sacrifices). Sometimes the consumer is sceptical of the brand's ability to deliver an acceptable cost to benefit ratio. In other circumstances, the consumer has every confidence that the brand is able to deliver what it promises; however, he or she still perceives the offering to be

inadequate for his or her functional requirements. In both cases, the brand is construed to be offering an unacceptable trade-off (main theme). In terms of historical realism, a person's conceptualisation of what a cost or benefit is, and the degree to which they assess the 'value' of some trade-off, is based on the time and place in which they exist.

Three sub themes (unfamiliarity, aesthetic insufficiency, and food favouritism) help to illustrate some interesting cases of deficit-value avoidance. For various reasons, unfamiliar brands are perceived to be of less value than better named brands, and are therefore avoided. In aesthetic insufficiency, participants avoided brands with unattractive packaging for two reasons: 1) because it acted as a cue for a lack of functional value; and 2) because aesthetic value itself was an important component of the brand offering. In food favouritism, it was discovered that brand promises perceived to be adequate in some consumption situations, suddenly became inadequate when food was concerned. Thus, some participants purchase products of a certain brand but avoid the consumables of the same brand because of the impact food has on the participant's health.

This thesis contributes to theory by incorporating the concept of a value inadequate brand promise to help shed light on another reason for brand avoidance. In particular, this thesis argues that it is possible for a brand promise to be negatively re-constructed, by the individual, to become an indication of unacceptable trade-off. Consequently, participants are motivated to avoid these brands and their inadequate brand promises, because they provide a poor cost to benefit ratio, and are unable to fulfil the individual's functional requirements.

3.4 Moral Avoidance: Detrimental Promises

The fourth type of brand avoidance emerging from grounded theory analysis is moral avoidance. The category of 'moral avoidance' consists of two main themes (country effects and anti-hegemony) and five sub themes (refer to Table 13 page 78). However, the common defining property shared by all of the themes is that the brands are perceived as being oppressive, unethical, and potentially harmful to the wider world; as a result, the consumer wishes to avoid the brands for moral reasons.

This thesis adopts a more holistic perspective of brands, and the following incidents help to reiterate the value constellation notion of brands (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998), where brands, companies, and countries may all become intertwined in the mind of the participants to represent related 'bundles of meaning'.

Thus, the broadest meaning of 'brand' is utilised in this category of moral avoidance, as the focus of rejection ranges from avoiding specific brands associated with a company (traditional definition), to avoiding the company as a whole (company as a brand), to avoiding all brands associated with an entire country (country as a brand).

Consumer cynicism is a concept that runs throughout the various incidents of moral avoidance and, thus, helps to shed light on moral avoidance in general. Cynics distrust in the altruism of others, while sceptics distrust the concept of true knowledge and hold a position of disbelief regarding a particular viewpoint (Merriam-Webster 1998). In marketing, a consumer is sceptical of advertising when they approach marketing communications with a sense of disbelief (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 2000), or when they tend to treat marketing messages with reservations until more evidence is provided (Mohr et al. 1998).

In slight contrast, consumers are cynical when they distrust the altruistic motives of organisations and/or believe that people/companies are motivated only by self-interest (Boush, Kim, Kahle, and Batra 1993; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001; Mohr et al. 1998). Though both constructs stem from a lack of trust, consumers who are cynical might hold more negative attitudes towards brands, since they are judging a company based on moral standards. A sceptic on the other hand is merely disbelieving towards the representation of information by the company (Boush et al. 1993; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998; Obermiller and Spangenberg 2000).

In this thesis, consumer scepticism has already been discussed under identity and deficit-value avoidance. Several themes in those types of avoidance involved the perceived inability of the brand to deliver functional or symbolic value to the individual; in other words a disbelief in the brand's ability to fulfil certain requirements. For instance, the sub theme of inauthenticity involved disbelief towards certain brands' genuineness. Similarly, scepticism of the brand's ability to deliver functional value emerged frequently throughout the main theme of unacceptable trade-off.

In contrast, cynicism is a general disbelief about the goodwill of others and is particularly relevant to understanding moral avoidance, especially since this category is concerned with the incidents where participants are wary or distrustful of business and capitalism in general:

Pharmaceutical companies are among the richest in the world, and they are behind wars and diseases, they are behind AIDS and they are behind all the Satanical things in the world because they want to sell their sh*t.

LB Int 1 (Female, 52)

Although LB did not practice brand avoidance of pharmaceutical brands she did mention in her interview that she supported homeopathic medicine, her quote also provides a vivid example of consumer cynicism. Not only is she disbelieving of the altruistic intentions of pharmaceutical brands, she goes as far as to blame them for the various illnesses of the world. Though the extreme view asserted by LB was not shared by all participants, a general sense of cynicism towards the more powerful companies was evident in the participants who informed moral avoidance. For example, DS's cynicism is conveyed in the quote below, where he discusses his distrust of big businesses and the way in which they conduct business:

Just look at petrol, electricity prices, I don't know what's going on, but one assumes that these companies do have a little chat in the toilets... I mean you go to a petrol station and try and find one with a different price, they're all the same price... I don't trust the media in general as far as I can throw them... the media are owned by private companies where "You scratch our back, I'll scratch yours"... There was a documentary made in England for example about the Mc libel case, a one hour documentary and TVNZ [Television New Zealand] refused to screen it, and the only reason one can conclude, is obviously because McDonald's does huge advertising with them.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

DS's comments reflect a cynical view of large companies, as he accuses the energy corporations of price fixing and the media firms of withholding a documentary.

Generally, large multi-national companies seemed to elicit higher levels of cynicism than smaller companies. In this thesis, *McDonald's* emerged as the most distrusted brand in terms of its behaviour towards consumers, society, and environmental welfare; and as a consequence, was avoided by some participants for moral reasons:

All they're [McDonald's] out to do is make a buck; they don't really care about your health and the only reason they're bringing in salads is because they're losing their market... losing the money because people are getting much more aware about their eating habits. They're not really doing it because they care about you.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

KB is cynical of *McDonald's* real motives; clearly, she believes that the advent of salads at *McDonald's* was driven by the company's desire to offset diminishing profits rather than its concern for consumer's well-being.

Moral legitimacy is the ability of a brand to benefit the greater community (Kates 2004). In terms of this thesis, and the category of moral avoidance in particular, the

focus is on 'illegitimate' brands; in other words, brands that are perceived to be hypocritical and detrimental to the community:

One of the things that does bother me especially with large icons like McDonald's is the whole promoting of health and well-being for children, yet they're one of the major causes of obesity... there is irony there, I just hate that they use it as a marketing ploy. I absolutely despise the McDonald's Starship hospital... just the whole fact that "We're providing funds to support health and well-being, the Ronald McDonald's house, in return we expect you to come and buy our food", so it's really not giving people a choice, they're actually placing in the psyche of the public that you're expected to buy, because we've just looked after your child, we paid for it, you owe us... what large multinational, international company is going to do things for nothing? There's no such thing as doing things for nothing.

MT Int 16 (Male, 42)

First, MT is cynical of the link between *McDonald's* and any form of 'health promotion' owing to his perception of the brand's influence on the obesity epidemic. He claims that the messages are ironic and 'hates' their use by *McDonald's* as a 'marketing ploy'. Second, *The Ronald McDonald House* is a charitable trust that houses the family of sick children during their convalescence or hospital treatment in New Zealand. However, MT 'despises' the use of a charity that, he believes, is designed to manipulate families into purchasing *McDonald's*. Third, MT's cynicism of multi-national companies is apparent as he can not believe that a large company can be altruistic without expecting a return on investment.

A similar cynicism is reiterated in the following excerpt, where DS is angered by what he believes to be disingenuous behaviour, on the part of McDonald's:

The fact that McDonald's is unashamedly buying cheap beef from Brazil, it is obvious that they were decimating the rain forests, hacking it down left, right and centre in order to have grazing land and McDonald's are then going to do something which I find highly cynical and makes me turn sort of green [sick] every time I see... the McDonald's rain forest park at Auckland zoo, I mean to me it's so hypocritical and so cynical, they don't give a sh*t about the rain forest, but they get that sort of [negative] publicity, and they think "Oh sh*t we better have a rain forest enclosure at the zoo". You don't know whether to laugh or cry when you see that stuff.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

The Ronald McDonald Rainforest is a primate exhibit at *The Auckland Zoo* largely sponsored by the *McDonald's* corporation. However, DS is certain that *McDonald's* is responsible for environmental degradation of the real rainforests in Brazil. The

closing sentence of his quote suggests that DS is not sure whether he should 'laugh' at the satirical situation or feel saddened by the ironic state of affairs. Owing to the hypocrisy of what the brand pretends to say and what the brand actually does, DS perceives the *McDonald's* brand to be morally illegitimate and detrimental to society. Consequently, he chooses to avoid the brand.

Past research suggests that companies with pre-existing negative associations may be evaluated more negatively when they attempt sponsorship in a related area, than if they had not undertaken sponsorship in the first place (Okada and Reibstein 1998). As observed in the case of *McDonald's* sponsorship of the rainforest enclosure and *The Ronald McDonald House*, some participants treated the sponsorship attempts of *McDonald's* with cynicism, thus, the findings of this thesis confirm those of Okada and Reibstein's (1998). A more recent study (Thompson and Arsel 2004) discovered that *Starbucks* was affected by a similar cynicism. After accusations of using milk derived from hormonally enhanced bovine and poor treatment of coffee growers in South America, *Starbucks* made organic milk and fair trade items available in their menu. In spite of this, some consumers still remain cynical and judge the gesture to be a marketing ploy.

The participants above provide particularly strong examples of the cynicism which some consumers feel towards large multinationals. Though it is not apparent from their excerpts, the rest of their interviews did suggest that MT, KB, and DS do try to avoid fast food brands. In any case, the main purpose of the quotes in this category is to illustrate consumer cynicism towards large multinationals and the *McDonald's* brand in particular. It appears that sometimes cynicism is so intense that even when a brand such as *McDonald's* attempts to increase associations of CSR, some consumers are still highly wary of the corporation's true motives.

The findings pertaining to moral avoidance confirm previous research on 'consumer cynics'. Proponents of consumer resistance generally did not believe that large corporations were capable of altruistic behaviour and that the marketplace could be an area of mutual benefits for both the consumer and the multi-national company (Dobscha 1998; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001). However, this thesis extends previous theory in three ways. First, most research on consumer cynicism explores general cynicism towards the market place rather than the avoidance of specific brands. Second, unlike the 'eco-feminists' studied by Dobscha and colleagues (1998; 2001), and people from the 'fringe' of consumer society that other consumer resistance researchers typically recruit, the participants of this thesis have been sourced from

mainstream consumer culture. Therefore, the findings that emerge from this thesis may provide a less extreme, and hence more practical, perspective to consumer resistance. However, the majority of participants in this thesis are well educated middle to upper class consumers who may possess a broader world view and display more concern for the environment, as a part of their social identity, than consumers from lower socio economic classes. Thus, this thesis does not claim that its findings are representative of all consumers. Third, this thesis takes into account and integrates the other reasons for brand avoidance. For instance, MT and DS avoid *McDonald's* not only because of cynicism, but also for functional, health related reasons.

There are obvious similarities between moral avoidance and identity avoidance. For instance, links may be drawn from KB, MT and DS's criticisms of *McDonald's* and the earlier sub theme of inauthenticity. Certainly, part of their brand avoidance attitudes is based on the inauthentic/hypocritical actions of *McDonalds*, and its lack of legitimacy. Furthermore, the main theories used to inform identity avoidance (organisational disidentification and image congruency theory) suggest that people manage their self-concepts by disidentifying with organisations, products, or brands, which they assess as being inconsistent with their own image and values (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Dolich 1969; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Graeff 1997; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Heath and Scott 1998; Hogg et al. 2000; Sirgy 1982). Thus, it is plausible that some of the motivation for moral avoidance may well stem from consumers wanting to disidentify with a brand/company whose unethical practices are perceived to be incongruent with their own moral values. However, in this thesis, moral avoidance and identity avoidance may be differentiated from one another based on the following three reasons.

First, in the previous categories (experiential, identity, deficit-value avoidance), a brand was avoided if it was perceived to impact negatively on the individual's own well-being. In contrast, moral avoidance consists of incidents where the individual avoids a brand because of the negative impact the brand or its company is construed to have on the wider community/world, this aspect of the data clearly became evident during coding. Thus, in terms of the negative promises framework, the notion of socially 'detrimental promises' helps to shed light on moral avoidance. Some participants perceive certain brands and their companies to be damaging to society; in other words, the brand promise, or what the brand is expected to deliver, has been re-constructed in the mind of the consumer, to convey a sense of societal detriment. So, not only do consumers wish to distance themselves from detrimental brand

promises in order to avoid approaching their undesired self, but more importantly, they wish to avoid these brands because of the negative way in which they are perceived to affect the wider world. Therefore, the main motivation for moral avoidance is the detrimental impact that a brand is perceived to have on society, rather than the impact that brand has on the individual consumer.

Second, all of the incidents coded under moral avoidance also share an ethical component. Specifically, the brand avoidance incidents used to inform this category are based on the participants' beliefs that their avoidance is the 'right' or 'good' thing to do. In other words, when certain brands are perceived to be detrimental to society, because of what they promise to deliver, some consumers consider it an act of morality to avoid those brands. Existing literature in the area of boycotting (Day and Bodur 1978; Garrett 1987; Herrmann 1993; Hirschman 1970; Klein et al. 2004; Kozinets and Handelman 1998; Richins 1983; Singh 1988), helped to sensitise this researcher to incidents of moral avoidance. However, brand avoidance and boycotting are not the same phenomenon. A boycott, by definition, is the temporary act of exiting a relationship from an organisation, due to some form of dissatisfaction, accompanied by an assurance of re-entering the relationship once certain conditions have been met, such as a change of policy by the offending party (Hirschman 1970). Certainly, boycotts that are directed at a specific brand or company, and trade sanctions imposed on a country, probably involve cases of brand avoidance. However, the assurance of re-patronage is not a precondition of brand avoidance, so brand avoidance may continue even when the offending party has rectified its transgressions.

Third, this researcher's interpretation of moral avoidance is informed by previous literature on consumer resistance (Dobscha 1998; Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Penaloza and Price 1993; Thompson and Arsel 2004). An important theoretical component of consumer resistance is the existence of a structure of dominance and the imbalance of power between consumer and the market place. The concept of 'hegemony', or domination, helps to further distinguish moral avoidance from the other types of avoidance. First coined by Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is used to describe a scenario where one group "moves beyond a position of corporate existence and defence of its economic position and aspires to a position of leadership in the political and social arena" (Gramsci 1971p. 20). Hegemony is the idea that a diverse culture may be lead or dominated by one group or class of people. Indeed, there is growing concern that the largest multinational brands not only lead the world in a business setting, but they are

now also able to influence society on a broader level (Klein 2000b). In relation to this thesis, some participants perceive certain brands as being overly dominant and powerful. For some consumers this dominance is fine, as hegemony does come with some benefits, such as economies of scale, lower costs, and wider availability. However, as this section will reveal, some participants believe that highly dominant brands should be avoided because their hegemony may have some detrimental effects on society.

These three criteria of moral avoidance (social detriment, morality, and hegemony) have already been observed during the discussion on consumer cynicism, and help to differentiate the category of moral avoidance from identity avoidance.

Consequently, for incidents to be coded into the construct of moral avoidance there needed to be: the presence of a domineering force which the individual is resisting, a concern regarding the negative impact of the brand on society, and an ethical component, where the participant believes that their act of avoidance is the 'right' thing to do. Thus, the main reason for moral avoidance is not undelivered promises that lead to unmet expectations, symbolically unappealing promises that threaten to move the consumer closer to his or her undesired self, or value inadequate promises. Instead, moral avoidance is motivated by a perception that hegemonic brands, and what those brands promise to deliver, are detrimental to the wider community.

Moral avoidance consists of two main themes 'Country effects' and 'Anti-hegemony' (see Table 13, page 78). The first main theme, 'Country effects', has two sub themes (animosity and financial patriotism). 'Animosity' involves the avoidance of brands because of the hostile feelings that the participant has towards a brand's country of origin. 'Financial patriotism' involves the avoidance of brands perceived to have a negative impact on the consumer's country of residence. The second moral avoidance main theme, 'Anti-hegemony', consists of three sub themes (monopoly resistance, impersonalisation, and corporate irresponsibility). However, all incidents featured in moral avoidance involve the rejection of large multi-national brands because of the belief that very large companies are detrimental to society.

3.4.1 Main theme: Country effects

This section deals with the incidents where participants avoid brands because of the negative associations they have of the country from which the brand originated (animosity). This section also considers the situations where participants avoid certain brands because they believe the brand negatively impacts on their country of

residence (financial patriotism). In both sub themes, the 'brand' and the 'country of origin' (COO) have become intermingled in the mind of the consumer. Thus, the consumer avoids both the brand and the country because they are perceived to have a detrimental impact on the wider world.

As a topic, COO is an interesting and well researched area which is conceptually very similar to the study of brands. It was discussed in the introduction, that the name of a country is often put to commercial use, therefore, in those circumstances, countries do become brands. In consumer research, both brands and COO are considered image variables or extrinsic cues. These are attributes that are not physically linked to the product itself, but depending on the consumption situation, may be used by the consumer during evaluation (Elliott and Cameron 1994; Erickson, Johansson, and Chao 1984; Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, and Hyder 2000; Zeithaml 1988). The basic premise underlying COO is that consumer's attitudes and behaviours towards a product will be influenced by knowledge regarding the origin of that product. The COO effect is especially robust when the consumer has less access to other information or is less motivated to process information (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, and Ramachander 2000; Elliott and Cameron 1994; Hong and Wyer 1990; Hong and Wyer 1989; Maheswaran 1994; Zeynep and Maheswaran 2000). Just as a brand may be used to infer a set of values such as reliability or quality, and influence product evaluations, so too may a country and its associated socio-economic and technological conditions (Elliott and Cameron 1994; Hong and Wyer 1990; Kaynak et al. 2000). For example, electronics made in Japan and Germany are often considered superior to those made in Taiwan and Thailand (Maheswaran 1994).

In this study of brand avoidance, the influence of country effects emerged in several ways. One involved the avoidance of a brand because its COO indicated a lack of value. In these circumstances the country is treated by the consumer as an indication of functional value, in a similar manner to the way in which a brand may be used as a quality cue. Research has focused on investigating the impact of COO on consumers' assessments of products (Batra et al. 2000; Janda and Rao 1998; Maheswaran 1994). Thus, a brand which is strongly linked to a certain country might take on the functional attributes of that country. As a result, consumers may avoid brands associated with countries that they believe to produce substandard goods. For instance, previous research posits that developing nations may face more difficulty when attempting to export technologically advanced products (Janda and Rao 1998). The difference between COO and deficit-value avoidance is that the

COO avoidance must include the rejection of a brand because of its association with a particular country and that country's values. In contrast, deficit-value avoidance does not require reference to a particular country.

If money isn't an issue, I'd go for the highest quality... (*Interviewer: What will make it high quality?*) Quality in terms of where it's made, most of the products are made in China, but sometimes some of them are made in Denmark... if it's made in China you can see it's rough; if you put it side by side, you can really see the difference in quality. It's that obvious.

KL Int (Male , 20)

The previous quote displays the use of COO as a basic indicator of quality. Given the choice KL would prefer to purchase a product of high quality. For him, a product 'branded' by being made in China is evaluated as being worse than a product 'branded' as originating from Denmark. The avoidance of a brand because its COO indicates a lack of quality is similar to the phenomenon already observed in the theme unacceptable trade-off (deficit-value avoidance). Therefore, this first relationship between brand avoidance and COO does not contribute anything new to the understanding of brand avoidance, which deficit-value avoidance has not already explained. However, in the main theme of 'country effects', another scenario emerged. The data revealed that not only could the functional attributes of a country be associated with a brand, but sometimes the perceived morality of a country may also be associated with a brand. In other words, some participants wished to avoid brands that come from countries construed to be unethical. This discovery forms the basis of the following sub theme, 'animosity'.

3.4.1.1 Sub theme: Animosity

The animosity model (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998) can be used to inform the second relationship between a brand's COO and brand avoidance. According to the animosity model, "consumers might avoid products from the offending nation not because of concern about the quality of goods, but because the exporting nation has engaged in military, political, or economic acts that a consumer finds both grievous and difficult to forgive" (Klein et al. 1998 p. 90). This thesis contributes to theory by suggesting that sometimes a brand and the country with which it is most associated, can become linked, and as a result, the animosity towards that country transfers onto its brands.

Certainly, several incidents that could be described as 'animosity' did emerge in the current research, especially in cases where the association between the brand and country had become iconic. That is, the link between the two was so strong that they

were considered by the participant to be almost inseparable. In a sense, the brand had been 'branded' by the country, and the sensations elicited by the two became the same (Grayson and Shulman 2000; Mick 1986):

I want them to get ruined, by me not drinking Coca-Cola... Coca-Cola used to have more or less some positive impact, in the developing world in many countries, a symbol of youth... or American lifestyle, this is the more basic view, but gradually, with this aggressive foreign policy ... Coca-Cola is more like a symbol... the more symbolic a brand is the more vulnerable it is... (*Interviewer: Is that the foreign policy of America the 'government' or the foreign policy of the American brand, that 'company'?*) They are a part of the [same] thing... because big companies; are big taxpayers, somehow they are involved in this mafia... you can't be so tremendously rich, and don't have anything to do with policy, its not possible... I was on one of these anti-war events and I heard just simple [average] people [saying] 'Let's ruin them! We don't have to buy their stuff!' they mentioned Coca-Cola, McDonald's... (*Interviewer: The reasons why these people avoid it, was the American thing?*) Political yes... because when you have aggression you will have reaction. (*Interviewer: What does America stand for you disagree with? What would make you avoid brands that come from America?*) Killing people (laugh) is that not a good reason?... All this aggression for money, for petrol, 'No blood for oil' all these things... it's all about money you know, taking over what's left on the planet, that's what they are doing.

LB Int 1 (Female, 52)

LB raises an interesting point by highlighting *Coke's* symbolic status as the quintessential American brand. A brand that is highly successful can come to be identified with the cultural heritage of an entire nation. More than any other brands, *Coca-Cola* and *McDonald's* have come to symbolise western values and American ideals (Belk 1996; Ger and Belk 1996) their successful marketing has resulted in them becoming icons of America. LB states that 'the more symbolic a brand is the more vulnerable it is', since *Coke* is highly symbolic of America, the value constellation of *Coke* begins to merge with the value constellation of America. Consequently, the country and brand becomes the same entity in her mind. Owing to issues of morality, LB's political viewpoint is anti-American, and because of the income they generate, LB believes that large companies contribute to the power of the country from which they originate. She simply does not believe that a company/brand can be 'so tremendously rich' without somehow being involved with policy at a national level. As a result, she avoids brands strongly associated with America.

Her sentiments were also shared by another participant:

I was going to bring this up earlier actually, it's not something I understand fully but I tend to try and steer away from things American, I guess you find it pretty common... I don't necessarily perceive Coke to be an American brand, McDonald's I guess I do... (*Interviewer: What do you think it is about them?*) I don't like the thought of supporting American ideas and ideals and having money that I spend with American companies go to America... They do things like go and bomb the sh*t out of Iraq. (*Interviewer: Can you elaborate on what to you are American ideas and ideals?*) I think Americans are very insular, they're very inward looking, they don't have a lot of regard for the rest of the planet and when they do it's only to meet their own needs, meet their own ends. They can be very arrogant, American people and their culture is very arrogant ... their relation with the rest of the world, or at least as I've seen it, is one of dominance, and they do dominate economically and militarily... I guess I don't like the American brand... (*Interviewer: When you say you don't like the American brand, what don't you like, what are the adjectives of that brand?*) Arrogance, ignorance, heavy handedness.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

For AP, *McDonald's* is the brand he perceives to be most symbolic of America, which he judges as consisting of many negative moral values, one of which includes the notion of dominance/hegemony. American values are incongruent with his personal values, and consequently, AP wishes to avoid *McDonald's* for its association with America and for the detrimental impact the American brand is perceived to have on the world. Furthermore, AP also dislikes the thought of his money being used to support American ideals. In a way AP is an international citizen who is 'voting' with his wallet; by boycotting the 'American brand', AP is making a personal stand (doing the 'right' thing) against the current American government. At the time of this research, there was, and still is, much controversy surrounding America's second entry into Iraq. Within New Zealand, large segments of society were quite vocal in their opposition to what they perceived as an American 'invasion' of Iraq, and shared AP and LB's anti-American sentiment.

The sheer market dominance and iconic status of the brands discussed have obvious advantages for *Coke* and *McDonald's*; however, as this thesis has demonstrated, such powerful symbolism also has weaknesses. Just as a country's strengths can become inextricably linked to a brand, so too can its perceived faults (Kaynak et al. 2000); thus, when a country comes under criticism so do the brands which symbolise it.

3.4.1.2 Sub theme: *Financial patriotism*

Another country effect that can be used to understand brand avoidance, involves cases where participants avoid brands that they see as being detrimental to the local economy. This avoidance of certain brands, usually the dominant ones, is often accompanied by an approach towards locally made products; hence these incidences are motivated by 'financial patriotism'. There are two reasons that help to shed light on why the consumers in this study sometimes prefer local products. The first is similar to the basic COO effect mentioned earlier. Consumers in 'developed' nations prefer domestically manufactured goods, while those in 'developing/less affluent' nations prefer foreign goods produced in the 'first' world. These preferences are strictly based on COO effects, whereby a developed nation is associated with superior technology and infrastructure, and therefore is perceived to produce high quality products of elevated status (Batra et al. 2000; Ettenson, Wagner, and Gaeth 1988; Green et al. 2003; Kaynak et al. 2000).

Hence, in a developed country such as New Zealand, financial patriotism and COO are highly related, with New Zealand consumers tending to believe that locally made products are of a higher standard than most imported products. Indeed, some participants of this research try to avoid brands made in developing countries, such as China, because they perceive brands made in those places to be lacking in functional value. However, this finding does not add anything new to the understanding of brand avoidance, which deficit-value avoidance does not already explain.

The second reason for financial patriotism is the avoidance of brands that participants judge as being detrimental to their country's long term wellbeing. In other words, the brand is avoided more for being seen as a detriment to the local economy, than simply because it is a foreign brand of low quality. Thus, one main reason for coding the following incidents as a sub theme of moral avoidance, instead of deficit-value avoidance, is because these cases of financial patriotism are accompanied by the intention to improve/protect the local economy. Furthermore these cases, like others in moral avoidance, involve the perception of a dominant brand having a detrimental impact on the greater community, and a desire by the participant to do the 'right' thing. For instance, the following participant avoids a brand which he believes to be detrimental to the future economy of New Zealand, despite the fact that the company is locally owned:

I know it's owned by a New Zealander but a lot of the stuff in there [The Warehouse] is just crap from overseas. They know this, they certainly market it and try and say yes we use New Zealand made stuff as much as we can. But I'm not always so convinced. (*Interviewer: So is that because it's a lot of stuff from overseas, or is it because it's low quality?*) I think they go hand in hand really. It seems to me that the good quality stuff is still made over here... If we wanted to, we could globalise everything and we could make things super efficient, but to me that has a cost and it has a regional cost and we have to be realistic and say some regions are better off, are better places for resources and labour than other regions, so that there's always going to be winners and losers if we pursue that sort of extreme globalisation... but I still think a good healthy domestic industry is good for the country.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

Scepticism towards the brand's claims and the perceived value of its products are apparent in DS's quote (deficit-value avoidance). However, a further reason compounding his avoidance of *The Warehouse* is the detrimental impact he believes this large company has on the domestic industry. Consequently, although COO and perceptions of quality is mentioned, they are not as prevalent as DS's ideological focus on the 'domestic' economy.

Not all multi-nationals are avoided indiscriminately or evaluated negatively. As the participants' quote below suggests, only those that are considered detrimental to the New Zealand economy are avoided:

Fisher and Paykel are now going to Australia, maybe they'll go to the US, but because it originated in New Zealand that would be all right because the money's coming back to New Zealand... If it got into the US market and making money then no, I probably wouldn't go "Oh they're making too much money", I'd think "Oh good on them???" [Irony] If they're based in New Zealand, if they take their stuff offshore, forget it, you know what I mean?

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

VL acknowledges her hypocritical view that favours her own nation. As long as the multi-national company benefits the local economy VL is fine with the organisation's dominance elsewhere, unless the company relocates 'off-shore', in which case VL would avoid the company brand. Once again, the focus is on improving the country as a whole, rather than on the individual's immediate needs and wants.

Consumer ethnocentrism is an area which may be used to further inform this sub theme. Defined as a general disposition that can be measured using the CETSCALE (Shimp and Sharma 1987), consumers are characterised as being 'ethnocentric'

when they display a tendency to buy locally manufactured goods. The product is purchased, not because of merit, but because consumers believe it will be 'better' for their in-group/local economy. Similarly, imported products are avoided because of the consumers' beliefs that it is 'wrong' to support an out-group/foreign competition above their own nation (Shimp and Sharma 1987).

Consumer ethnocentrism and 'animosity' towards a country (the sub theme mentioned earlier) are two distinct constructs. Ethnocentrism is a general disposition in people to favour their own country, while the 'animosity' is antagonism towards a specific country (Klein et al. 1998). In this sub theme of 'financial patriotism', ethnocentricity is the more relevant construct, since a consumer may be generally patriotic towards New Zealand brands, and may avoid brands that they believe are detrimental for the local economy, without harbouring any animosity towards a particular country. The following quote may help to elaborate why some consumers prefer local products, as well as demonstrate the patriotism that is felt by some consumers without animosity towards another country:

I'm very patriotic, I've lived overseas and wherever I lived I always tried to purchase New Zealand products, because we are a little country and I realise the importance of the economy against the rest of the world. If I buy, for example, Villa Maria from Sainsbury's in London, I know that someone in New Zealand has a little job at Villa Maria... I've travelled widely and appreciate what New Zealand has to offer and what it has given me as a person and relative to the rest of the world... it matters that New Zealand remains on the map. It took so long for it to 'get there'... I've loved everywhere I've been, but it's lovely to come home and, I'm just that way... think New Zealand, be New Zealand, buy New Zealand... I'm not actively avoiding anything; I'm deliberately choosing to buy New Zealand to keep New Zealand working... that decision for me means that my children and their children will have good futures, yeah it's a big picture decision, whereas maybe for others it doesn't go that far I don't know... but by me actively keeping, doing my bit for the economy I feel good about that and that I'm making a positive contribution to my immediate society.

MS Int 5 (Female, 46)

MS's patriotism is evident in the slogan 'think New Zealand, be New Zealand, buy New Zealand'. She has lived overseas but still identifies with New Zealand as home. In her evaluation of New Zealand's economy she reveals an underdog mentality characteristic of consumer resistance, she positions New Zealand's "economy against the rest of the world" and comments at the length of time it took for New Zealand to gain recognition on the world stage. MS describes the struggle of a relatively small country in an international environment and her connection with the

'local' economy when she buys a New Zealand brand in London. Although MS's comment describes brand selection for New Zealand brands, rather than specific instances of brand avoidance, it is still linked to many components of financial patriotism and moral avoidance in general. In her own words, her financial patriotism is driven by 'big picture decisions'. Her focus on the future generation, the immediate society, and issues greater than herself, as well as her intention to do the right thing, or as MS puts it, 'doing my bit', are all hallmarks of moral avoidance. Lastly, since she prefers brands that are made in New Zealand, inherent in this consumption decision, is the active avoidance of foreign brands.

More overt displays of brand avoidance, owing to financial patriotism, are provided by consumers who choose to avoid multi-national companies because they believe that the profits gained within their country might be redistributed elsewhere. Some participants assumed that surplus funds might go to other areas in the world that are deemed more appropriate by the corporation and envisaged this as being less beneficial than keeping the profit within the New Zealand economy. Consequently, these participants' avoidance of brands were also motivated by 'financial patriotism':

McDonald's, I guess they're franchised I just think they're all over the show. Give small businesses a go, they [McDonald's] have so much of the market share, they really don't need any more of it... you know how they've got this McCafé thing, I'd rather go to a small business café and give them my money than go to a corporate... they have such a consumer market, they don't need to take over the world... Local guys, like New Zealand... you keep the money in New Zealand as opposed to foreign ownership. That helps New Zealand... one would hope it helps the environment; the education... the money, the charities that they support and all that kind of thing... helping our economy, improving the standard of living, hopefully creating more jobs, people might feel obliged to donate to charities which then may help research; of course I'm paid out of a non profit organisation, and without donations from people I wouldn't have... part of my salary.

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

I think I'd rather support the little guy... support local and grow local... If you buy something from the guy that lives down the road, the profit he makes on that sale and that production is generally contained within your country and community and it's going to grow to the benefit of everyone around you. Whereas a multinational takes the profit wherever it needs it I suppose and it's not guaranteed that it's going to stay in the same country... In the long run it improves the quality of life for people in my community.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

Similar to MS, both VL and AP also have their own catch-phrases that help to convey the socially constructed importance of a strong local economy. Phrases such as such as 'Give small businesses a go' and 'Support local grow local', have obviously been developed within the wider social context in which they have been brought up. Both VL and AP value their local community and are adamant that a strong domestic economy provides both societal and individual benefits in terms of environment, education, and quality of life. They pursue these benefits by ensuring their money remains in the local financial system. One method of achieving their goals is by avoiding multi-national companies/brands where there is less 'guarantee' that their money will remain in the community. In other words, they perceive large brands as having socially detrimental promises, with regards to their country of residence, and avoid those brands accordingly.

Along similar lines of thought, the argument that multi-nationals 'create' many jobs is disputed by the following participant:

They argue that they are a net creator of jobs because of their big industry, but I believe people consume the same level and instead [if] you have lots of private organisations such as cafés, little Indian and Chinese restaurants, I think you would have more people employed, because you wouldn't have that same economies of scale... you lose that efficiency but you're having more employment, I think it's a net creator of jobs... you also have that regional economy which is a base for jumping off for other products, other developments, particularly research and development... if you don't have any base industry to begin with, it's very difficult.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

DS raises the issue of a balance between 'economies of scale' that benefit multi-national organisations and a 'less efficient system' that improves the standard of living for society. Although 'less efficient', DS believes that having more small businesses creates a stronger economy for sustained competitive advantage in the international arena, more so than having a few dominant companies/brands. Thus, by avoiding the larger and more dominant brands, he is able to do what he believes is the 'right' thing for his country.

The comments above suggest that, for some consumers, foreign brands are normally avoided in favour of local ones. However, previous literature highlights the gap between attitudes and actual purchase behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969; Fishbein and Ajzen 1972). More specific research in COO also corroborates the gap between intentions to purchase products made in certain countries and actual purchase behaviour (Elliott and Cameron 1994; Ettenson et al. 1988). Elliot and Cameron

(1994), showed that consumers consistently preferred locally made products as opposed to imported goods, so long as perceptions of quality and price were equivalent. The following negative case also highlights the conflict between doing what is 'right' for the greater good, and doing what is 'right' for the individual:

If I was given a choice to buy a New Zealand made thing for the same amount and made in China, I would go for made in New Zealand... But if it was substantially different... for example \$20 for a t-shirt made in New Zealand and it costs \$10 to make it in China, the same quality, the same brand, hello, who are you going to choose? Unfortunately my patriotism will go out the window.

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

Despite the importance VL places on a strong local economy, as communicated by her previous quotes, she acknowledges that there is a price tag on idealism. Similar to prior research, although some participants prefer local brands, their actual behaviour is influenced pragmatically by the price of the brand. Thus, in this case, there is a link between deficit-value and moral avoidance. VL normally avoids foreign brands in favour of supporting local brands (financial patriotism), however, her intentions are also dependent on perceived value (unacceptable trade-off). Once again, this demonstrates that the reasons for brand avoidance are inter-related and multi-dimensional, thereby reinforcing the necessity of an integrated understanding of brand avoidance.

3.4.2 Main theme: Anti-hegemony

The previous main theme of 'country effects' involves the avoidance of brands owing to the hostility towards its country of origin (animosity) and the avoidance of brands that do not contribute to the local economy (financial patriotism). Another component of moral avoidance involves the resistance of multi-national brands that are perceived to be overly dominant within the marketplace and society. Such brands may be described as being hegemonic (Gramsci 1971), and therefore the second main theme of moral avoidance is termed 'anti-hegemony'; which literally means against domination. Specifically, participants informing this theme believe that hegemonic brands are socially detrimental to the world in terms of their ability to monopolise competition and globalise culture diversity (monopoly resistance), to remove the human element of a transaction (impersonalisation), and to cause environmental devastation and capitalise on unethical employment and trade policies (corporate irresponsibility).

Literature in the area of consumer resistance was drawn upon to inform this category (Cohen 2005; Holt 2002; Klein 2000b; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004; Zavestoski 2002a). Consumer resistance consists of counter-cultural attitudes and behaviours that aim to question the current capitalistic system, oppose dominant forces, and reduce consumption. Typically, only multinational or very large brands are targets of anti-globalisation (Dobscha 1998; Holt 2002; Klein 2000b; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Penaloza and Price 1993).

Indeed one salient reason for anti-hegemony (and moral avoidance in general) stemmed from an ideological sense of justice and a desire to distribute power, wealth, and quality of life evenly within and across societies. The following quotes illustrate the metaphorical struggle between the 'underdog' or, the little guy, versus the 'big names', or corporate establishment:

I would prefer to support the under dogs than support the big name conglomerates. (*Interviewer: What would happen if you supported the big name?*) Nothing cause it wouldn't make any difference... it's easy to go "Oh you know I'm not going to bother composting because nobody else in my street does, or I'm not going to bother putting my stuff in the recycling bin, because nobody else does." I think that if everyone thinks like that then you can't do anything in the world and I think that if every person makes some effort to separate their plastics into the recycling bin and to not support some of those big names... I think people are getting more aware of it, it's better for the environment and that kind of stuff... I don't think in the long run you'll ever get away from something like McDonald's. So I don't know, but I think it's just personal satisfaction with what you're spending your money on, in the long run and not being held sway to stuff.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

Even though it would be 'easier' to do what everyone else does, in order to make a positive 'difference', KB is willing to invest some 'effort' and do her part for society by resisting the 'big names'. Judging by her quote, it seems that in her mind, her avoidance of big name brands is comparable to other ethical behaviours such as recycling and composting. Although she appears fairly optimistic that other consumers may also feel the same way in terms of environmental awareness, she acknowledges that the battle against corporate giants may never be won. In spite of this, KB still derives meaning and personal satisfaction from her acts of consumer resistance and doing, what she believes to be, the 'right' thing.

I think left to itself, that's where capitalism would go eventually, you would basically just have a convergence of multinationals who would eventually rule overall. I think that's inevitable in a capitalist system, in

the name of efficiency and economies of scale, you've got to eventually merge. So that's why you do need a little bit of intervention.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

DS also believes that an 'inevitable' part of a capitalist system is that hegemonic brands will become increasingly powerful. For this reason, he acknowledges the importance of 'intervention', in other words, resistance.

In general, two forms of consumer resistance exist, 'reflexive' resistance involves an automatic cynical and sceptical stance towards the market place, and has already been discussed, while 'creative' resistance involves the 're-appropriation' or use of marketing 'tools' in a manner that they were not initially designed for (Holt 2002; Klein 2000a; Klein 2000b; Rumbo 2002). In this thesis, a mixture of 'reflexive' and 'creative' consumer resistances are observed:

It's probably not just myself, but there is a tendency of de-consumption... more or less, rebellion towards the environmental problems. Because with such aggressive consumption behaviour the planet will collapse soon... de-consumption is reducing the consumption, and this is in every field, it's in food, in clothing in everything. Like people rebelling towards advertisements, marketing, selling, all this stuff, and trying to be more ethical... trying to react towards the brainwashing of advertisements, this is all a part of the whole thing... so I don't care where I'm going to be eating or... what's written on it... this is more or less post-modern behaviour... becoming a chameleon, so today I might buy hamburger, but tomorrow I'll be cooking Chinese... The so called consumers... become less disciplined, less predictable, and the more you try to get [to] them the more difficult they are to get... so the brand policy is in trouble.

LB Int 1 (Female, 52)

At a moral level LB disagrees with the consumption driven society in which she lives, believing that it is detrimental to the world. Her statement 'It's probably not just me' suggests that she believes her opinions and actions are shared by other people, and is perhaps developing into a wider societal norm, at least within the context of well educated middle to upper class Western consumers. LB provides an example of reflexive resistance when she proposes that people are 'trying to react' against the 'brainwashing of advertising'. She then suggests that consumers are becoming less 'disciplined and predictable'. Thus, instead of behaving in a way which she believes marketers would like her to behave, she does not 'care' about her consumption practices and chooses to be a 'chameleon', this part of her behaviour is analogous to creative resistance (Holt 2002). Lastly, LB concludes by saying that 'the more you try to get them the more difficult they are to get'; this statement alludes to an increasing

phenomenon that some marketing scholars have described as a 'cat and mouse' game between the marketing system and the consumer (Rumbo 2002).

The following excerpt also demonstrates aspects of consumer resistance:

I think some of those really expensive places that do have goods that are really [high] quality... can be quite different and can be really beautiful, but I still wouldn't put their advertising on me, because I don't really want to advertise their company. It might be different if I bought a really nice pair of pants or something and they had it on them somewhere, small, but I still wouldn't go wearing a t-shirt... I do have some fake shoes from Bangkok and I quite like those, because everyone's like "Oh...they're Diesels". They're fake Diesels... and I wouldn't have gone and paid \$200 for them, I think I paid \$10 for them. (*Interviewer: So you don't have a problem with buying pirated brands?*) No, but I wouldn't go and buy a pirated Nike t-shirt [due to the prominent logo]... they're very cool sneakers anyway and I would have bought them even if they didn't have Diesel written on them... I don't walk round as if I'm wearing Diesel's, if someone comments on them I say they are 'Decals', but I'm not pretending, I'll correct them... I think it's funny that people go 'Oh those are cool jeans, oh they were only \$10?', cause people associate... that I've gone out and spent \$200 on them... you can get the same brand, the same thing for \$10 and no one really knows the difference, and I think it's quite funny.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

Reflexive and creative resistance are also evident in KB's comments. First, it is not the perception of the brand's functional ability that contributes to KB's brand avoidance, as she thinks that some expensive brands are of high quality. Instead, she believes that wearing a label is a form of advertising for the company, and as a result, reflexively avoids buying brands that have prominent labels. Second, apart from saving money, KB's quote implies that she derives more meaning out of using a counterfeit brand than had she bought an original brand. Thus, creative resistance is evidenced by her re-appropriation of the marketing tool *Diesel*, turning it into her own brand *Decals*.

The imbalance of power between the large hegemonic corporations and the lone consumer is most evident when the one-sided use of 'psychic space' is considered. Multi-national brands are able to 'bombard' consumers with advertising messages continuously, while the individual remains relatively powerless to communicate with, or have any significant effect on, a large organisation. This 'colonisation' of psychic space by the dominant marketing system has been posited as a reason for peoples' resistance against pervasive brands (Handelman 1999; Klein 2000a; Rumbo 2002).

Things that I perceive to be branded heavily, I don't see a lot of Adidas advertising... so I'll wear that stuff. (*Interviewer: So anything you see heavily advertised, you'll actually go against?*) Yeah, cause stuff's pushed at me all the time. Nike's the one that springs to mind... it's the fact that it's really over hyped. (*Interviewer: What's the problem you have with something that's over hyped?*) That it's pushed all the time, it's thrust at you everywhere. I get sick of seeing the emblems... the advertising... I think about the money that's spent, all this energy that goes into pushing something at me... Why should I buy Nike? On past experience I haven't bought Nike for various reasons, but I'm still hearing it, but for the same reasons I'm still not buying it, but I'm still hearing it and I'm still hearing it... I probably wouldn't buy a sports bag with Coke on the side of it or anything like that either... I don't want to be carrying around somebody's promotional bag... if they were giving away coke t-shirts, I wouldn't take one.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

In the quote above, AP is annoyed about the amount of 'money and energy' that is put into 'thrusting' a particular brand message at him, a message which he does not believe. He is also irritated at the inability to avoid 'hearing' about the hegemonic *Nike* brand and he is 'sick' of seeing the advertisements and 'emblems'. As a consequence AP avoids the brands that he believes to be 'over hyped'. In addition to anti-hegemony, AP suggests that he has his reasons for avoiding *Nike*, but these reasons have not been addressed by the company. Thus, he considers that the money spent on 'pushing' the same unconvincing message at him could be utilised more ethically; for example, by paying employees better wages, which he mentions elsewhere during his interview.

As individuals, the three participants above practice their resistance in slightly different ways, but the thread that connects their avoidance is that of consumer resistance. However, in addition to drawing upon consumer resistance literature, this thesis further extends the understanding of brand avoidance and contributes to theory by delving deeper into the other motivations for brand avoidance that exist within anti-hegemony. Therefore, to be coded into anti-hegemony, not only must brand avoidance incidents involve an oppressive force that the consumers seek to resist, but there must also be an ethical undertone in participants' attitudes and behaviour, and a concern for the wider society. To this end, the following sub themes help to demonstrate the variation within anti-hegemony that the consumer resistance literature has not taken into account. The sub themes of anti-hegemony are monopoly resistance, impersonalisation, and corporate irresponsibility. These sub themes are displayed in Table 13 (page 78).

3.4.2.1 Sub theme: Monopoly resistance

In this thesis, some participants perceive hegemonic brands, and their ability to monopolise an industry, as being a socially detrimental promise. Thus, an emergent motivation for avoiding the more dominant brands was to prevent companies from developing into monopolies.

The word 'monopoly' is misleading, since true monopolies seldom exist due to government legislation and regulation. Therefore, the term 'loose' monopoly (Hirschman 1970), or oligopoly, best describes the notion of a few highly dominant corporations, as mentioned by the participants of this research. Loose monopolies are not strict 'monopolies', but are companies which possess near market domination, hence making alternatives very difficult to find (Andreasen 1985; Hirschman 1970). Nonetheless, both terms are used interchangeably within this research as the participants used 'monopoly' to describe a hegemonic company that had considerably market dominance.

In previous literature, consumer activists suggested that they were opposed to large multi-nationals because of the threat to competition (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). Other researchers have also discussed the gradual reduction in value provided by 'loose' monopolies (Andreasen 1985; Hirschman 1970). In a loose monopoly scenario, if an offering is inadequate, a small group of 'quality elite' consumers may be able to find alternatives and may choose to leave. However, the majority of consumers are typically reluctant to explore other options and are uninterested in voicing their dissatisfactions. As the company gains more market share and dominance within an industry, its competition is gradually eliminated or subsumed. There are fewer elite consumers left to voice complaints, more costs for the remaining consumers of finding alternate providers, and, consequently, less motivation for the monopoly to provide competitive offerings. This downward spiral of events means that loose monopolies in an industry are "conducive to poor performance by firms" (Andreasen 1985 p. 137).

Since they have no competition to be compared against, some participants believe that a monopoly does not need to provide consumers with extra value for money or innovation:

The larger the bank the worse service you get... they [Barclays] don't seem to value their customers... customer service wasn't their priority, they were so large, they didn't really give a monkey's about customers... smaller banks were kind of vying to get customers, they'll treat people with a bit more respect... I'd probably avoid British Airways, again

because they're very big and they don't seem to value their customers as much as smaller airlines... I think for years people just put up with whatever, you've got choice A and choice A would be the biggest, the best, with the most routes, anything else in the market just wouldn't have been up to scratch, you wouldn't have been... confident that they'd get you there... People were more confident with bigger companies. For years that's what they did, they just didn't ask questions and went with them.

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

AR suggests that the larger the company/brand the less they care about consumers. He also believes that consumers of the past had more 'confidence' in the larger brands and had fewer choices while the modern day consumer has much more opportunity to avoid the larger companies because of increased competition and ease of access to other offerings (Aaker 1996; Achrol 1997; Holt et al. 2004; Keller 1993).

Sony is a very well known... for televisions and all that, that's why I feel they may take advantage of this; they may not give the consumer value for money. So I'd rather go for the underdog than Sony... I would go for the slightly less famous brand... sometimes I feel you pay that much just to get the status Sony... the quality will most likely be the same, but the money we've added doesn't really give you anything, it's just extra profit ... When it came to computer chips, the main chip makers are Pentium and MD the main brands and I've come to realise that Pentium was more of a favourite with everyone, just because it was mainly used, and when I start to see that something's being used too much, I tend to think that they actually take advantage of that and give the consumer less value for money... I think competition is very vital, if the system is a monopoly, the consumer will be cheated and you won't have a chance to do anything about it. Competition ensures that the prices are kept stable, they're not going to sky rocket, if a company monopolises something they can... price the item at any value they want.

KL Int 11 (Male, 20)

Although *Sony* is not technically a monopoly, the underlying concern of KL is that as a company becomes the dominant player in any industry or comes closer to becoming a monopoly, the chances of the consumer being taken advantage of increases. This perspective is an interesting, since traditional marketing theory suggests that dominant companies are successful because of their ability to satisfy and provide value for customers. Ironically, for KL, *Sony's* success may actually be used to 'take advantage of' the consumer, since 'well known' brands are indeed able to charge a premium owing to their established reputation. Consequently, KL's consumer resistance manifests itself in the form of supporting the 'underdog' and avoiding the dominant brand; by doing so, he hopes to maintain the vitality of the

competitive environment and as a result, ensures that 'value' is maintained. Obvious links may be drawn to the theme 'unacceptable trade-off' (deficit-value avoidance), as part of KL's motivation for monopoly resistance is driven by a fear of losing value. However, in this sub theme 'monopoly resistance', the brand does not indicate a lack of value just yet; instead, it represents the potential to become a monopoly as the brand gains dominance. Furthermore, the focus of both KL and AR's concerns extend beyond them as individuals, as they use terms such as 'customers and people' (plural) and phrases like 'the consumer will be cheated' rather than 'I or me'.

In addition to the detrimental impact that monopolies have on value, there is also the fear of losing diversity. Epistemic value is the value of experiencing something new and exciting (Sheth et al. 1991), and is one reason for variety and novelty seeking behaviour in consumers (Hirschman 1980; Ratner, Kahn, and Kahneman 1999). For instance, some participants value variety for the sense of identity it provides:

I wouldn't say that I'm anti-mainstream in that I have like dreaded hair and wear really alternative clothes, but I'm just not into the big labels. I prefer things that are a little bit different... sometimes I like it when you can get something at markets... from people who are young designers... a little bit different and stuff... I'll have a look around... I've got 25 pairs of shoes and I could have three pairs of really expensive designer shoes, but I'd rather have an eclectic mix of shoes that I found half way across the planet and stuff.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

As her quote suggests, KB simply prefers variety in her clothing and things that are 'a little bit different', and displays fondness for diversity that is independent from the influence of multi-national brands. Obviously, if the market were monopolised by a few dominant brands it would be more difficult to achieve or maintain an 'eclectic mix'. Novelty selection has also been asserted to be a method of improving the individual's knowledge of a product (Hirschman 1980), and might be the reason why the following participant prefers to 'try something different':

Two things, one for being different and one for supporting the underdog... to try something different because it's easy to get information with what other people are buying, because they are already buying the more popular brand so it's easy to access, you can just ask them and they'll just give you that experience "Oh this, this and this I've been using this and there's been no problem". But I would like to make my one comparison by buying the other product, the less popular brand, that way after having done that, I can make my own judgement.

KL Int 11 (Male, 20)

By avoiding hegemonic brands and once again 'supporting the underdog', and consuming a variety of products, not only can KL 'be different' but he can also gain knowledge with which he may 'make his own judgements'. In some ways, preference for diversity may also be linked to deindividuation (identity avoidance), since variety enhances the individual's sense of uniqueness (Ratner et al. 1999). However, in relation to this thesis and moral avoidance, the fear of losing cultural diversity (to the detriment of society) was the main motivation for monopoly resistance.

Through the process of mass-production, market dominance, economies of scale, and corporate takeovers, some participants are concerned about the potential loss of local/independent businesses; in particular, small businesses which are not under the authority of large corporations. Thus, one major motivation for monopoly resistance is the desire to preserve diversity, thereby preventing the loss of alternatives or freedom of choice:

You've got better choice, you've got better service, if you don't like one then you can go to another one, you can sample more and if someone annoys you, [or] you repeatedly have bad service, then you don't want to keep going back to that one place if that's the only thing you've got, you want to be able to go "Well okay I'm switching my choice, and I'm switching my money and my loyalty to something else"... going against the norm in some ways, to be able to go "No I don't want to be the run of the mill, I don't want to be a sheep I want to go and make my own choices"... able to be slightly different, if you want to be, it's not that I have to be different, it's just if I wanted to be... I don't want to be [in a situation where], "I have to have McDonald's, it's my only other choice." I want to be able to say "Okay now I can have Indian or Chinese or whatever."

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

VL resists *McDonald's* because a monopoly reduces her freedom of choice and the potential to switch brands if she is dissatisfied. However, also apparent in her quote is the claim that diversity, or the power to choose among a variety of alternatives, preserves her ability to 'be different'.

Once again, participants frequently mention *McDonald's* as a brand that they avoid due to its detrimental impact on local shops and cultural diversity. JJ indicates below, that the functional aspect of *McDonald's* is only one part of the equation (deficit-value avoidance). She believes that *McDonald's* is not healthy, but suggests that her main reasons for avoidance are the political aspects behind *McDonald's* as she alludes to the link between America and *McDonald's* global dominance (animosity). JJ believes that a person visits other countries to learn about the various components of the

culture; thus, she avoids the *McDonald's* monopoly because she finds the homogenisation of cultural diversity 'pathetic and boring'. In addition to illustrating monopoly resistance, JJ's quote also highlights the integrative nature of brand avoidance and the links that exist between the various motivations for avoiding brands:

As long as you keep it in moderation, should be okay. If you really like McDonald's, you can still keep healthy but I think I don't like the politics behind it, and they are pushing it in every country and it's meant to be this symbol from America and it's so not healthy... What's the big deal about it, it's not like it's this great, I don't know, food category or whatever, it's not even healthy, it's not even tasty for me, you know so that part of it, McDonaldisation...I mean you go to a foreign country to learn their customs and their cuisine, and you find McDonald's, I mean that is so pathetic, sorry, I mean and it's so boring... when you go abroad and you find all the same clothing store branches, it's so boring... you know the culture is getting homogenised and I much prefer cultural diversity and specific locality than this chain thing.

JJ Int 3 (Female, 25)

They're so big; they've got the marketing, the advertising power, and the ability to undercut and literally decimate the sole trader... I mean food is a very sort of social and cultural kind of activity. We don't just eat now because we're hungry; we eat because it's a way of getting together with friends and it's almost a hobby if you like. There's all these places to eat and you do derive great pleasure by going somewhere that you've never been before and actually trying new things. I do, it's wonderful. I don't understand people who go day in and day out to places like McDonald's or takeaways or whatever and just get the same sh*t... You'll head towards a global culture and to me that's a loss of humanity. I think diversity is a wonderful thing... Another shop I avoid is Trade Aid, which is interesting given my lefty leans... but to me they're almost taking the products of cultures and making them subservient to an economic capitalist system, or a market driven system... if people in New Zealand say "Wow I like these dinky little vases but I don't like that style" we'll start buying the style we like and the culture might stop making the style that people don't like, and that will be a loss eventually... to me that is not a culturally sensitive system at all... it's driven by profit.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

DS conveys a similar opinion of *McDonald's* and the way in which it poses a threat to smaller independent business and 'humanity'; he then states the importance of maintaining diversity. DS also raises an interesting point in the second half of his quote. As the influence of globalisation intensifies and a profit driven focus is introduced into a culture, DS believes that the commoditization of cultural artefacts could lead to a loss of diversity. Hence, even though the profits of *Trade Aid* are

claimed to 'benefit' the people who make the goods, ironically, DS perceives the brand to be both hegemonic and detrimental to the culture in question. He feels that the brand actually makes those people 'subservient to a marketing system' and he fears that such a system may eventually lead to a 'loss' of diversity.

For the participants above, the fear of losing diversity or culture owing to the hegemony of multi-national brands may also be interpreted as a fear of losing authenticity. Thus, this sub theme of 'monopoly resistance' may be linked to the sub theme of 'inauthenticity' (identity avoidance). However, several factors distinguish these incidents from the aforementioned cases of 'identity avoidance'. In moral avoidance the loss of authenticity or diversity is perceived to be detrimental to the world and not just the individual. The loss is also attributed to the hegemony of an entity, whether it is a brand, system or company. Finally, moral avoidance contains an ethical component; all of the participants avoid particularly hegemonic brands whenever they can, because they feel it is the 'right' thing to do.

Compounding the fear of losing diversity is the fear of losing choice. The participant below mentions *Starbucks* as a brand she is motivated to avoid because of its ability to homogenise local cafés/culture, and threaten the individual's freedom of choice:

I think that people's individual opinions are very important. The second you start saying that people have to go to Starbucks then you're sort of insinuating that you control every part of them. I mean I don't go to Starbucks, but if people want to go there that's fine. It is convenient, but I don't think that it's the only place to go and I think that individual choice is important for people... one thing with Starbucks is that they're all the same, they've got the same seats, the same table and everything. Whereas in local cafés, you sort of get a mish-mash of different stuff and I think that's quite nice, it adds a bit of, not culture, yeah I suppose it is culture to it... an ambience, different ambience is created in different cafés. I mean you don't go somewhere like Brazil on K road for a quiet cup of coffee, you go somewhere like Rebel or something up on K road and you go different places for a different feeling.

KD Int 6

KD considers a loss of diversity/culture and choice, to be a loss of power. She has concerns that *Starbucks* could become an oppressive force taking away the consumer's ability/right to choose an alternate café. This perspective, that there could be a potential for an imbalance of power to develop, is characteristic of consumer resistance. Additionally, KD raises a point that *Starbucks* are 'all the same', and although KD makes no judgement of the consumers who do decide to choose *Starbucks*, she does attest to the importance of having different options

available for different consumption experiences. As a result, the brand is perceived to be hegemonic and the *Starbucks* brand promise is perceived to be detrimental to diversity and 'culture'; thus, the brand is avoided by KD.

For some participants, *Starbucks* is the new face of globalisation. The excerpt below likens the omnipresence of the hegemonic brand to an 'invasion':

Every single high street that I go into there's a Starbucks... there's this globalisation of high streets and retail areas, you get a McDonald's, you get a Starbucks and it's becoming uniform, it's almost like it's an invasion of these big American companies. Starbucks is one of the most typical of all, because every single high street or every single main street in every city, there's a Starbucks popping up... I mean really there's no difference between Starbucks and McDonald's, but for some reason I don't know why, Starbucks seem to be invading the smaller streets as well as the larger main strips, they seem to be getting in there, doing an even better job to invade those areas. It's probably not the case, but they seem to be more invasive than McDonald's... the interiors are all the same, [and] the range is going to be exactly the same throughout the whole world... all these streets are being cloned, like I said, Starbucks, they almost seem to be spearheading the whole invasion.

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

Once again, there is a subtle reference to authenticity in both quotes (KD and AR). After remarking on the 'sameness' of *Starbucks*, KD comments on the 'culture' of local cafés; similarly AR likens the uniformity of *Starbucks* to 'cloning'. The uniformity associated with *Starbucks* and subsequent associations of inauthenticity, when compared to local neighbourhood cafés, is one main contributor to brand avoidance. Thus, it appears that the avoidance of multi-national brands with the intention of preserving diversity is, at some level, driven by the fear of losing authenticity. However, in addition to a lack of authenticity, monopoly resistance is also motivated by a fear of losing value, variety, and the freedom of choice. Furthermore, this thesis contends that it is the combination of hegemony, the brand's detrimental impact on diversity, and the consumer's desire to 'do the right thing', that motivates moral avoidance; as opposed to one single factor by itself.

Traditionally, it would seem that the balance of power seems to favour the multi-national due to the financial resources and the cultural dominance they possess (Thompson and Arsel 2004). Indeed, the authority and control that some people believe multi-nationals have over the consumer is a major reason driving consumer resistance. However, the contemporary concept of 'glocalisation' suggests that rather than homogenising culture, the meanings associated with multi-nationals are able to

be appropriated and 're-constructed' by local practices and customs to create identities that are still unique to the local culture. The basic argument is that *Starbucks* existence may, in fact, be lending additional meaning to local cafés, and the appeal of some neighbourhood cafés are actually enhanced when juxtaposed against the multi-national brand (Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson et al. 2006). Thus, some marketers have suggested that by promoting café culture and educating consumers about coffee, in general, *Starbucks* may have actually aided the growth of local cafés (Helliker and Leung 2002).

Indeed, in this study, the preference for local cafés versus *Starbucks*, seem to emulate Thompson and Arsel's (2004) theme of 'oppositional localist', which suggests that loyalty to local cafés is enhanced by the consumer's opposition to *Starbucks*. Similarly, the concepts of 'oppositional brand loyalty' (Muniz and Hamer 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), and 'organisational disidentification' (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001), may also be used to inform the emergent findings of this study. These theories suggest that a person's self-identity or brand loyalty is developed not only through identifying with or being loyal to a brand/organisation, but is further enhanced by the consumer's avoidance of, disidentification with, or opposition to, a competing entity:

The local cafés I think they need a little bit more support...because they [Starbucks] are the monopoly aren't they? And that's what they're trying to do as time goes on more and more of them are popping up... people just roll in get your coffee at Starbucks, nobody asks me any questions. There's no alternative to that and a lot of people are quite happy to do that because Starbucks, let's face it, they probably give a really good service, a really good price, good spaces for you to sit down and chat, they give you exactly what you want. But [by] buying the things, they're pushing out the smaller family run businesses that offer a different service. (*Interviewer: What do you find important about the different service of the smaller local?*) To me it's more important because maybe it's family run or it's smaller, people have got more personal input, more of a reason to look after their customers. You feel like you're valued a little bit more and also the variety, just the variety from one café to another everything's uniform with Starbucks, pops out of a mould, that's what it is.

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

As his quotes suggests, AR's socially constructed understanding of cafés is created in comparison with *Starbucks*. Ironically, for AR, the appeal of the local café is amplified because of the threat that *Starbucks* represents. Hence, AR's brand avoidance of *Starbucks*'s not only supports the previous research mentioned above, but also highlights the relationship between tastes and distastes (Bourdieu 1984).

AR's preference for local cafes is developed in conjunction with his active distaste of *Starbucks*. Moreover, AR admits that there is nothing wrong with the functional aspects of the *Starbucks*'s offering; thus, brand avoidance for him is a moral decision based on the detriment that *Starbucks* poses to the independent café owner and his or her family. However, one more aspect of AR's quote may help to shed further light on brand avoidance. It is apparent that the ability to 'feel valued' and to identify/connect with the persons behind the brand is another reason why AR avoids hegemonic brands. The importance of the relationship between the consumer and the human elements of a brand is also mentioned by other participants. The lack of 'personal connection' between multi-national brands and consumers is not only unappealing but also perceived to be potentially detrimental to society. This aspect of anti-hegemony is discussed in the next sub theme.

3.4.2.2. Sub theme: Impersonalisation

Another motivation for moral avoidance, in particular, anti-hegemony, is the impersonal nature and facelessness of large corporations. In an attempt to maintain a consistent global identity throughout the world, some participants accuse multi-national brands of stripping away the human aspects of a product or service. In other words, some consumers believe that the standardisation of service and marketing communications results in a lack of personal connection with the human side of the brand. Once more, *McDonald's* and *Starbucks* are the prime examples that participants mention:

It's just a known identity, I prefer to support what I see, like if I go to little kebab shop... you could tell that they were father and son or a family kind of business and I can see that that's who they are and that's what they're doing. Whereas *McDonald's* I just see some employee who's been there for three weeks and just can't stand their job. I can't see whatever it is that's going on... I think it's just because they're out to make the big buck... and it's faceless, like whoever Ronald McDonald is, I've never actually met the guy, you know... they don't need my money whereas the little guy, like those guys at the kebab shop probably do.

KB Int10 (Female, 27)

One reason for KB's avoidance of *McDonald's* is based on the belief that the small business needs her money more than the large multi-national company; this motivation may also be coded as a case of financial patriotism, a previously mentioned sub theme of moral avoidance. However, another motivation for her avoidance of the brand is the lack of personal connection she feels towards *McDonald's*. Mascots are often used by companies to associate human

characteristics with the organisation and to generate a favourable personality for their brand (Belch and Belch 2004; Chitty et al. 2005; Solomon 2002); therefore it is ironic that KB accuse *Ronald McDonald* of being 'faceless'. As a result of this impersonalisation, it appears that the right thing to do, for KB, is to avoid *McDonald's* in favour of 'the little guy'.

The focus on the wider community is also reiterated by the participant below, who avoids *McDonald's* because he prefers to foster the personal connection he is able to have with local businesses. Furthermore, unlike identity avoidance, his avoidance is based on impersonalisation, rather than an attempt to manage his self-concept:

You try and have a chat with one of those kids that work at McDonald's and it's like "Move along, next"... (*Interviewer: So what is it about having that relationship... that is more appealing than 'in' and 'out' with McDonald's?*) They're part of the neighbourhood; they know who you are when you walk into the local fish and chip shop. You walk into McDonald's... what's the chance that they know who you are... I guess it's all about community, knowing who's in your community, getting to know people. That's one of the things that really doesn't happen in a lot of neighbourhoods too much. Having your local dairy, having your local fish and chip shop, just really helps that... that's part of the thing that creates safe communities... there's a level of trust. I can send my children down to the fish and chip shop knowing that the fish and chip shop guy knows who my kids are, so if they're not back in half an hour, I can ring him up and say did you see my kids down there? I cannot do that at McDonald's.

MT Int 16 (Male, 42)

In addition to feeling more connected with local businesses, MT suggests that personal relationships between people and businesses are a method of creating safer communities that contribute to the greater good at a societal level. In MT's opinion, hegemonic brands are less beneficial to society because it is more difficult for large brands like *McDonald's* to establish personal connections with the individuals of a community.

The following quote also refers to the impersonalisation of hegemonic brands:

Local small businesses generally have more personable approaches to their consumers and as a result they create that old fashioned, "Hi Michael how's it going, Flat white today?" Whereas if you walk into Starbucks, you're just another number... your local coffee shop... you get the service, "Oh I've just made these new cakes would you like to try one?"... It's a perceived threat [the impact of Starbucks on local cafés]. If I don't run my business in a personable way, I'll close down because people are getting better service at Starbucks... Small businesses have an amazing opportunity to nurture socialisation, communication, because in the world

of globalisation and McDonaldisation and shopping malls, people are in treadmills... but to be able to go and see Fred and John or whatever at the local coffee shop, feeds the human need for socialisation you know, monkeys in the zoo you know?

MS Int 5 (Female, 46)

Unlike the majority of other participants, whose quotes were used to inform moral avoidance, MS believes that the threat of *Starbucks* on smaller brands is a 'perceived', or false, threat, rather than an actual threat. However, her quote still highlights the notion of impersonalisation that affects hegemonic brands. SR believes that the lack of personal connection between consumers and large brands is a major disadvantage of multi-national companies. She claims that local businesses have an opportunity to create 'personable' relationships with consumers that the large multi-national companies are unable to replicate, owing to the impersonalisation effect.

An interesting proposition emerges from the quotations above. If some consumers are avoiding *McDonald's* due to impersonalisation, perhaps the lack of personal connection can be addressed by the store manager and other long standing members of the staff appearing more human and less 'faceless'. This approach is counter-intuitive to traditional branding strategies, which aim for consistency and uniformity. However, placing more emphasis on the owners of the store rather than the multi-national brand may give each *McDonald's* branch a 'family business' impression that may be favourable to some consumers, at least those who are similar to the participants above. Of course, this theoretical proposition must be interpreted within the context of this study. If a consumer is avoiding a brand because of impersonalisation, then 'theoretically', allowing the human characteristics of the staff to outshine the faceless brand may create some personal connection, which could address that specific form of brand avoidance. Although the strategy is theoretically valid it should not be generalised to all consumers. Therefore, this researcher is not implying that *McDonald's* reduce its emphasis on a global brand for the sake of a few brand avoiders.

Nevertheless, previous research on anti-*Starbucks* discourse does reveal similar sentiments to the above participants. Those studies suggest that local cafés are considered to be more appealing because of a direct comparison against the hegemonic *Starbucks* brand, resulting in the avoidance of *Starbucks* (Thompson and Arsel 2004; Thompson et al. 2006). Therefore, in addition to corroborating existing research, this thesis also extends previous theory by providing evidence of similar brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours towards other hegemonic brands, such as

McDonald's. Furthermore, this thesis also takes into account other reasons for avoidance that are not necessarily related to ideological incompatibility, such as deficit-value, identity, and experiential avoidance. Lastly, this thesis provides three distinct criteria for moral avoidance that may be easily applied: the brand is perceived as hegemonic/oppressive, the brand promise is re-constructed to represent a detrimental impact on society, and a person's brand avoidance is based on an ethical decision to perform what he or she believes to be the 'right' thing.

3.4.2.3 Sub theme: Corporate irresponsibility

The last sub theme in anti-hegemony is brand avoidance motivated by associations of corporate irresponsibility. There are generally two types of corporate associations. Associations of 'corporate ability' relate to the firm's capacity to deliver outcomes, while associations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) do not relate to the performance of the company, but are concerned with the corporation's obligation to society (Brown and Dacin 1997; Chen 2001; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001).

Esrock and Leichty (1998) assert that there are four central elements to CSR: morally fair and honest practices, product safety and reliability, treating employees well, and improving the environment. Although maintaining product safety and reliability is certainly part of socially responsible practice, this thesis considers them functional associations, likened to corporate ability. Consequently, the impact the firm's perceived or actual inability to accomplish a task has been covered in deficit-value avoidance as well as experiential avoidance. Therefore, this sub theme focuses on the incidents involving the avoidance of multi-nationals due to negative associations of corporate irresponsibility. Of particular relevance is brand avoidance owing to a hegemonic brand's immoral and dishonest practices, mistreatment of employees, and environmental degradation. Similar to the other sub themes within moral avoidance, the hegemonic company and its brands are perceived to be detrimental to society and, as a consequence, participants believe the ethical thing to do is to avoid the company's brands:

Sometimes when I hear about how a company does business, company culture and ethics and things like that... I think I can relate to those people in those companies and I demand to be paid fairly for what I do. I'm in a chain of supply that is paid fairly and it works. I can still afford the products at the other end of the chain that I make, that I'm a part of... It's all about where the value is added and where the real value is added, not just the perceived value. If I'm making a block of cheese and it costs \$10 to produce, and it's sold for \$12 for Brand A, fair enough it's 20%, it's okay. If I produce a block of cheese and it costs \$10, Brand B, and they

can sell it for \$15 and spend that extra \$3 on shoving the idea of buying that cheese into my face, I don't think it's kind of right.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

The 'ethics' of a company influences AP's decision to avoid certain brands. His understanding of 'fairness' is defined by the ability of the employee to afford the products they have been hired to make. Although the reasonability surrounding AP's notions of 'fairness' is hard to establish, what is clear, is the consumer resistance stance that he has adopted. In his view, there is a power imbalance that favours the hegemonic multi-national company/brand rather than the employee. As a result, AP is morally opposed to the company/brand spending extra profit to 'shove' the idea of buying the product 'into his face', instead of establishing more ethical employment practices.

Organisational disidentification theory suggests that consumers maintain their self-identity by distancing themselves from organisational values that are incongruent with their own (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Thus, a multi-national that is believed to be running its business in an immoral way creates negative brand associations from which some participants wish to distance themselves. Although this is similar to the concept of undesired self (Hogg and Banister 2001; Ogilvie 1987), and identity avoidance, the negative associations in corporate irresponsibility, that contribute to moral avoidance, usually relate to the impact of the multi-national on society in general, rather than the individual's self-image:

I don't like the big guy [Shell] exploiting other people's misery and their unfortunate circumstances. I mean you can project yourself into the roles of the people in Nigeria. You've got no rights, you don't have a vote, the whole country is just continual martial law under curfew. That sort of regime needs to be overthrown and something a bit more democratic or agreeable to the people needs to be put in. You've got multinational's coming in from the outside, they're not stupid, they know what's happening but they deem that it's profitable for them to go in and take oil and hopefully no one will notice. It's offensive to any reasonable person I think. They shouldn't just focus entirely on profit while completely ignoring the plight of the people... Nike is probably similar too... exploiting people's circumstances... they paid Michael Jordan \$200m for an advert that took two days to shoot and they showed that the average worker in the Nike factory in Malaysia or Thailand would have to work about 2,100 years to earn the same amount. Again it was a lot of children too, under the age of ten, who should be going to school, learning to read and write. Children should not be shoved in appalling conditions. *(Interviewer: If I was to play the devil's advocate, relatively speaking, in*

that country they may be doing better than their neighbours who aren't working in sweatshops, what do you say about that?) Well a lot of it too was forced on them, you can't really say they had a choice; they were basically selected and taken to the factories. As far as the relative payment goes, I can't believe someone is happy or better off working under those conditions and probably still only eating and living in conditions that they had before. I don't think they've really improved their lot. It's just now someone's come along and said "Work in this factory or you can't even have what you had"... I know we do look at it comparatively to the West... the people working in the factories are actually now being made subservient to a capital system, whereas their neighbours are probably still living that village life, it's not easy to compare the two... because it may be that they're eating and living just as well in the village lifestyle than the workers. But again it goes back to the children and choice, and how we should really be educating them... I also take offence with McDonald's advertising as well. I don't like the way they target children, a lot of people say that, that they try and have this illusion of normality that it's normal for families to go to McDonald's and eat all the time. Cause it is sh*t food; I don't think it does children any good eating that stuff on a regular basis.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

First and foremost, there is a mixture of elements in DS's quote which may be coded under various sub themes within this thesis, once again highlighting the integrative nature of brand avoidance. Second and more specifically, DS disidentifies with, and avoids, certain brands because of what he evaluates as irresponsible business practice. Immoral exploitation of other people's unfortunate circumstances is a salient theme in the first half of his narrative. Third, a more philosophical topic is also discussed; DS believes that companies can not justify the poor treatment of a person by paying him or her 'money' and then comparing the employee's level of income with other people in that country who have not been paid. DS reasons that since those people are raised in a different culture and have a different view of reality, a standard of living defined by a 'Western' world view is not an accurate representation of the situation. He posits that in some cases perhaps the unemployed population, though 'earning' less, may in fact have a higher quality of life. Finally, DS is 'takes offence' to the advertising tactics of *McDonald's* and the promotion of its substandard product to families and, in particular, targeting children. Here, DS's negative evaluation of the *McDonald's* brand is further compounded by associations of corporate irresponsibility. Thus, overall, it becomes apparent that DS's brand avoidance is actually motivated by a combination of symbolically unappealing, value inadequate, and socially detrimental brand promises, associated with the *McDonald's* brand.

The following passage also reiterates the way in which the various sub themes may combine to motivate moral avoidance:

There's no reason for anyone else to do anything original, if you just hand over to these big multi-national corporations. I'm not a massive follower of anti-globalisation, but I do think that you've got to support local shops a bit more, to keep a variety and at the end of the day you'll probably get better service as well, people will value you being a customer a lot more... To have that choice, I mean the worst thing in the world is to walk down one high street or one main shopping street in one town and see all these uniform shops down there and then go to another one hundreds of miles away and it be exactly the same... (*Interviewer: So what would be so bad about, if you imagine everything is all Starbucks, no more local cafés?*) Just because you've got no choice, at the end of the day this multinational company is making the money out of it. People that want to start their own café and maybe do something slightly different... they're not going to have a chance.

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

First, in AR's brand avoidance of *Starbucks*, he implies that there is an oppressive force that needs to be resisted rather than 'just handing over to them'. Second, financial patriotism is mentioned as one reason for brand avoidance since AR believes in supporting 'local shops'. Third, aspects of impersonalisation and unacceptable trade-off (deficit-value avoidance) are also present in his quote. He believes that local cafes may provide better service because they value their customers more than multi-national companies. Fourth, monopoly resistance is evident as AR desires to preserve diversity for the sake of having a variety of choices. Furthermore, he fears that smaller cafés are 'not going to have a chance', may be driven out of business, and, 'at the end of the day', it is the multi-national company that benefits in terms of monetary gains rather than the 'people' who may want to start their own business.

In line with the excerpts throughout the anti-hegemony main theme, and previous research (Esrock and Leichty 1998), typically, only hegemonic companies are held accountable for their actions. The bias against multi-national organisations may be due to their higher visibility, which means they are often under higher scrutiny. This condemnation of multi-nationals might also be due to the greater impact they are perceived to have on the environment:

I think that when things are operating on a really big scale like that that they are often doing more damage to the environment... I'm not saying that all the little guys added up aren't doing damage as well, because probably every little coffee store is doing just as much damage as

Starbucks in terms of pollution but I don't know, so that doesn't really make sense does it? But it seems worse when it's like McDonald's.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

Although large companies are usually perceived to be more detrimental to the environment, an interesting contradiction is raised by KB. She reasons that the combined damage of many small businesses on the environment could be greater than the impact of a few large multi-nationals; especially if smaller businesses are under less scrutiny and are less regulated in their practices. However, in general, due to the influence and 'success' of large corporations, acts of corporate irresponsibility 'seem' to be 'worse' when committed by large multi-national corporations than smaller companies. The following participant also shares a similar sentiment:

Shell specifically because they are not very high contributors to environment health. They were mining for oil in some of the jungles in the Congo or... Malaysia I believe. They were exploiting the labour force, whilst making great capital profit. So specifically for that reason I try to avoid Shell. (*Interviewer: What is it that you find so unappealing?*) The fact that they're exploiting the environment, perhaps destroying niches and fragile eco systems, yet they're not putting anything back into the market for that destruction... In today's planet, there's a lot of us humans, I think that big companies such as Shell, to an extent [are] role models, in that industry. They have to set an example and to take into account the damage they're costing for the operation... The big CEOs make thousands and millions of dollars from each operation. They have to be considerate and socially responsible for the extraction of minerals and resources and they have to consider, or put something back into the environment to minimise that impact. (*Interviewer: Do you think the little companies are not as bad when they do it, or do you think they're not doing it?*) Oh maybe they are doing it but because they are so small, or smaller in comparison, their impact will not affect a greater area of the environment as such.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

The size and hegemony of *Shell* was the main reason underlying RH's brand avoidance of *Shell*. RH believes that 'big companies such as *Shell*' are required to act as a 'role models' for other smaller companies and to be 'considerate and socially responsible'. In contrast, the last sentence of his quote seems to dismiss the responsibilities and impact of smaller companies as being of less consequence. RH's view is also in line with previous research on consumer resistance, where large and successful companies are more likely to be targets of consumer criticism (Holt 2002; Klein 2000b; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Arsel 2004).

This thesis corroborates the views of other consumers in previous consumer resistance research. Specifically, some participants in this study also perceive the more dominant brands as a metaphor for 'greedy corporate bullies'. Additionally, this thesis further contends that some participants' socially constructed understanding of business is that market hegemony and ample financial resources provide dominant companies with little justification to act immorally. In contrast, the underdog companies, with whom participants are more likely to form a connection, may be construed as small businesses that are struggling to survive, potentially making their transgressions more excusable. This double standard, which appears to be harsher towards the large brands, is evident not only in the sub theme of 'corporate irresponsibility', but also throughout the 'anti-hegemony' main theme.

3.4.3 Summary of moral avoidance

Moral avoidance is motivated by the perception of socially detrimental brand promises. What the brand promises to deliver, and the negative impact this is perceived to have on the wider community, is incompatible with some consumers' moral values. Two main themes emerged from the data (country effects and anti-hegemony) and several sub themes help to illustrate a variety of moral avoidance incidents. However, the commonality in all cases is that the hegemonic brand, company, or country represents some form of detriment to society, and as a consequence, some participants desire to avoid the brand for ethical reasons.

An obvious argument concerning the moral avoidance category could be that it is merely a subset of identity and/or deficit-value avoidance. For instance, links are drawn from impersonalisation and monopoly resistance to inauthenticity (identity avoidance); monopoly resistance to unacceptable trade-off (deficit-value avoidance); and corporate irresponsibility to undesired self (identity avoidance). The most pertinent similarities were highlighted throughout this discussion. However, there are several reasons as to why moral avoidance remains a separate category that has not been subsumed into the other two types of avoidance.

First, the frequency and fervour in which participants remarked about the way a company conducted its affairs, meant that moral themes emerged from the data and interviews in a very clear manner. Grounded theory emphasises allowing the data to drive analysis; thus, the saliency in which socio-political comments emerged by themselves, warrants treatment of moral avoidance as a separate and important category.

Second, the other types of brand avoidance are based on the socially constructed understanding of a brand and how it impacts on the individual's immediate well-being. Moral avoidance, on the other hand, is based on the perception of the brand at an ideological level and how it negatively impacts on the wider society. Thus, although identity and deficit-value avoidance are focused on the perceived inability of the brand to satisfy the consumer's symbolic and functional requirements, moral avoidance concerns the brand's influence on society and the world, and has a long-term broader focus. A study of consumer activists mentioned a similar notion whereby "activists seem... to leave their own small selves behind, to transcend time and space, and to attain a sense of connection with people across the globe or with the planet itself" (Kozinets and Handelman 2004 p. 695). This sentiment was reflected in many of the participants who helped to inform moral avoidance.

Third, a consistent theme throughout moral avoidance is the existence of a dominating or oppressive force that the participant resists; in this thesis, that oppressive force is either a hegemonic corporation or another country. This characteristic of moral avoidance is informed by previous literature in the area of consumer resistance and other similar domains (Dobscha 1998; Gramsci 1971; Holt 2002; Klein 2000b; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Moisio and Askegaard 2002; Penaloza and Price 1993; Rumbo 2002). Kozinets and Handelman (2004) liken consumer activism to a "David and Goliath... battle between good and evil" (p. 697), while Moisio and Askegaard (2002) refer to consumer resistance as "retaliation against cultural hegemony" (p. 24). The power imbalance, between the multi-national brand and the consumer, is distinct from the category of identity avoidance and avoiding negative reference groups or the individual's undesired self. This component of brand avoidance, based on resisting hegemony, is another important distinction of moral avoidance that is not present in the other avoidance types.

The final distinguishing criterion of moral avoidance is that it is motivated by the participants' beliefs that they are doing the 'right' thing. In other words, because some brands are perceived to be oppressive and overly dominant, and their brand promises are judged to be detrimental to society, some participants believe that it is morally appropriate to avoid such brands. This ethical component is another integral characteristic of moral avoidance that is not present in the other types of brand avoidance. Previous research in the area of boycotting (Day and Bodur 1978; Garrett 1987; Herrmann 1993; Hirschman 1970; Klein et al. 2004; Kozinets and Handelman 1998; Richins 1983; Singh 1988) helped to sensitise the researcher to incidents of moral avoidance; however, it was established early in this discussion of

moral avoidance, that brand avoidance and boycotting are not the same phenomenon.

Overall, the findings in this section of the thesis corroborate existing research. However, this thesis contributes to theory and advances the study of brand avoidance by incorporating the concept of the brand as a socially detrimental promise. More specifically, this thesis argues that the meaning, value constellation, and promise of some hegemonic brands were able to be re-constructed in the mind of consumers to become representative of a damaging force on society. As a result of this negative re-construction of brand meaning, some participants chose to avoid hegemonic brands for moral reasons. From a broader perspective, this thesis further contends that in addition to consumer resistance and boycotting, other reasons and disparate literatures must be drawn together to fully understand brand avoidance. This contention has been accomplished in the preceding sections discussing experiential, identity, and deficit-value avoidance.

3.5 Summary of Chapter Three: The Reasons for Brand Avoidance

The first two research questions this thesis sought to address were: What brands are avoided by consumers and why do people avoid certain brands? Grounded theory analysis of the qualitative data resulted in the emergence of several reasons that helped to explain why particular brands were avoided. Thus, the findings discussed in chapter three provided some answers to both questions.

As the chapter revealed, many brands at various levels (product, service, retail, company, and country brands) were avoided by typical consumers. The plethora of avoided brands ranged from those perceived to be of low quality (*No frills*, *Asda*, and *Basics*) or deficient in value (*Country Road*, *Sony*, *Gucci*, and *Louis Vuitton*) to brands that reminded the consumer of prior negative experiences (*The Warehouse*, *KFC*, *Thai Airways*, and *Cathay Pacific*). Various sports and fashion brands (*Nike*, *Reebok*, *Rip Curl*, *Amazon*, *Dickies*, *Michael Hill Jeweller*) that were perceived to represent undesirable traits and/or groups, or thought to be lacking in authenticity were also avoided. Finally, multi-national company/brands (*Coke*, *McDonald's*, and *Star bucks*) and, in some cases, country brands (*America*) were also the target of brand avoidance.

Chapter three also discussed the main drivers of brand avoidance. Although the data revealed many themes, by using the grounded theory method of constant

comparison and delimitation (Glaser and Strauss 1967); four types of brand avoidance were classified. These were: experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral avoidance. The reasons motivating each type of avoidance varied from negative first hand experiences with specific brands (experiential avoidance); to the perceived inability of a brand to fulfil certain symbolic or functional requirements (identity and deficit-value avoidance); to the ideological incongruence between the individual's moral values and a country/company/brand's policies or practices (moral avoidance).

This thesis contributes to theory by offering the negative brand promises framework as an innovative way of understanding brand avoidance. In experiential avoidance, the brand promise has been undelivered. As a result, the brand is negatively reconstructed in the consumer's mind to become a constant reminder of unmet expectations and a symbol of a negative consumption experience. In identity avoidance, some brand promises are symbolically unappealing to the individual. Thus, by avoiding the brand the consumers are able to distance themselves from their undesired selves. In deficit-value avoidance, brand promises are perceived to be value inadequate, and are subsequently avoided because they represent an unacceptable cost to benefit trade-off. Finally, in moral avoidance, the principles associated with certain country brands or large multi-national companies/brands are ideologically incompatible with the consumer's moral beliefs. Specifically, from the consumer's perspective, the brand promise, or what those brands are thought to deliver, are perceived to be detrimental to the world. As a consequence, some consumers feel it is their moral obligation to avoid those brands.

Overall, the four types of brand avoidance (experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral avoidance) and the concept of negative brand promises that help to explain the motivations behind participants' brand avoidance behaviours (undelivered, unappealing, inadequate, and detrimental promises) have provided some answers to the research question: why do people avoid brands?

CHAPTER FOUR: MANAGING BRAND AVOIDANCE

Whilst chapter three discussed the reasons for brand avoidance, insights pertaining to the conditions that may prevent or stop brand avoidance are also of importance; especially since such knowledge may be relevant in managing brand avoidance. Therefore, chapter four discusses the second thesis objective, which is to consider the factors that may restrict or alleviate brand avoidance.

Previous literature posits that the link between attitudes and actual behaviour may be tenuous (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969; Fishbein and Ajzen 1972; Smith and Swinyard 1983; Solomon 2002). Certainly, in the context of this thesis, participants occasionally contradicted themselves by admitting that they did sometimes consume the very brands that they held avoidance attitudes against. In other words, although most people may have brand avoidance attitudes, not all people will carry out their behavioural intentions.

Two research questions (Table 3, page 53) were asked in order to elicit discussion of the circumstances in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated: what prevents brand avoidance from occurring? And what conditions may stop brand avoidance?

Even though avoidance attitudes towards certain brands were made apparent during the interview, the first research question was asked to explore the incidences that prevented a consumer from turning their avoidance attitudes into actual brand avoidance behaviour. Thus, this first line of questioning explored the circumstances surrounding the last time a consumer used the brands he or she wished to avoid.

The second research question (what conditions may stop brand avoidance?) was asked so that the researcher could ascertain when, and under what conditions, brand avoidance would end, or at least be alleviated. Thus, the second line of questioning hypothetically asked what conditions would be necessary for the consumer to repurchase the brands that he or she was currently avoiding.

Sometimes, during interviews and without prompting from the researcher, participants would discuss incidents that pointed to the restriction or alleviation of brand avoidance. The qualitative data emerging from those occasions also contributed to this chapter on managing brand avoidance.

The qualitative data gathered from the combination of approaches described above indicates that several conditions prevent some participants from carrying out their brand avoidance behaviours.

First, when participants believe that there is a lack of suitable alternatives, they are less likely to exit an existing relationship, even when dissatisfied. This behaviour has also been observed in previous research (Andreasen 1985; Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Hirschman 1970; Jones, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty 2000; Panther and Farquhar 2004):

It was because it was the least busy and quickest, and the other choices were all fast food as well... but that once again tends to be a convenience thing; if everything else is closed.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

As JH's quotation demonstrates, the convenience of *McDonald's* in terms of opening hours, location, and ease/speed of transaction and a lack of other suitable alternatives restricts JH's ability to avoid the *McDonald's* brand despite his anti-*McDonald's* attitudes.

Second, some participants admit to staying with brands, that they would like to avoid, owing to the extra cost of switching: time, effort, and uncertainty. Indeed, previous literature has suggested that the termination costs of switching financial services is a major factor explaining why many customers remain 'inert' or stay with the same company despite being dissatisfied, even though equivalent competitors exist (Bendapudi and Berry 1997; Hirschman 1970; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Panther and Farquhar 2004; Zauberman 2003):

I got really annoyed with them but it takes time and you've got to change all your automatic payments so I'm just... too lazy.

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

As VL's quote suggests, even though she is 'annoyed' with her current bank she admits that she is too 'lazy' to invest the time and effort required to switch banks. Thus, she remains inert, tolerates her existing brand relationship (even though she evaluates it negatively), and, as a result, is prevented from avoiding her current bank.

Third, some participants are prevented from avoiding a brand because of the influence of other people (such as friends or family):

I ended up having to go at Christmas time because the people I was travelling with wanted to go to McDonald's, but it's not my choice.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

Despite stating her avoidance attitude towards *McDonald's* during her interview, when SR is put into a situation where other people insist on going to *McDonald's*, she yields to peer pressure and is no longer able to follow through on her brand avoidance intention. Although she defends her contradictory behaviour by claiming that it was not her 'choice'.

Finally, low involvement with a product category was also discovered to prevent the participant from consistently avoiding a brand. Previous research asserts that during consumer decision-making, low product involvement is normally accompanied by a reduced emphasis on the brand. This is partly due to the perception of 'sameness' across brands (O'Cass 2000; 1986; Zaichkowsky 1985). Therefore, when a person believes there is a lack of differentiation across the brands of a particular product category, the influence of a brand diminishes.

I might still go in there to get something like a fish hook that I know will last, there's nothing too technical about it. I probably wouldn't buy a TV or a stereo from *The Warehouse*, but I would buy food if it's cheap or the same brand as elsewhere, it would just be cheaper.

SW Int 17 (Male, 24)

Since SW is not involved with his purchase of a fish hook, his usual preference to avoid *The Warehouse* is not carried through in this situation. However, the moment his involvement with a product increases, for example if he were to purchase a TV, he reverts back to his brand avoidance of *The Warehouse*. Therefore low involvement in a product category seems to prevent SW's from avoiding *The Warehouse* brand consistently.

It is important to acknowledge the factors that may prevent brand avoidance. However, the four factors above (lack of alternatives, inertia, influence of others, low product involvement) are, typically, beyond the direct control of the firm. Thus, what would be more useful for practitioners and scholars is a discussion of the strategies that the firm may actively initiate in order to manage brand avoidance, in other words, avoidance antidotes.

As the following chapter will demonstrate, not only does this thesis contribute to academia by addressing the conditions that restrict or alleviate brand avoidance, but

it also contributes to marketing practice by offering some theoretical insights that could, potentially, be used by practitioners to manage brand avoidance.

4.1 Avoidance Antidotes

Avoidance antidotes concern the circumstances that may restrict and/or alleviate an individual's current brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, participants were asked what conditions would need to occur in order for them to change their minds, or to re-select the brands which they have been avoiding.

Five main themes emerged from the grounded theory analysis of participant transcripts: transforming, diversifying, enhancing, restoring, and irreconcilable promises (displayed in Table 15). The first four discuss the various strategies that may be used to manage brand avoidance. In contrast, the fifth theme (irreconcilable promises) also emerged during the interviews and data analysis, but alludes to the incurable nature of some participants' brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours.

Managing brand avoidance	Main themes	Sub themes
Avoidance Antidotes	Transforming promises	Genuine change
	Diversifying promises	Sub-branding
	Enhancing promises	Value augmentation Image adaptation Network formation Positive WOM
	Restoring promises	Sampling solution
	Irreconcilable promises	Incurable avoidance

Table 15 Restricting and alleviating brand avoidance

The previous chapter asserts that some brands may be negatively re-constructed in the minds of the consumer to represent negative promises, which the participant then chooses to avoid. This chapter on avoidance antidotes discusses the incidents where brand avoidance may be managed through the implementation of strategies that deal directly with negative promises. For example, a participant may avoid a brand because he or she perceives the brand promise as being value inadequate; however, 'value augmentation' is a potential strategy for managing brand avoidance that

emerges from the data. In terms of the negative promises framework, ‘value augmentation’ is one of a number of avoidance antidotes that may help to ‘enhance’ negative brand promises, thereby restricting or alleviating brand avoidance.

Similar to the preceding chapter, the main themes reflect a higher level of abstraction; here the researcher’s interpretations are linked back to the negative promises framework. In contrast, the sub themes remain closer to the data and reflect the participant’s thoughts and experiences.

The main themes, and the order in which they will be discussed, have been arranged to reflect the degree of control a company has over the various avoidance antidotes. This thesis contends that an organisation possesses a great deal of jurisdiction over the implementation of the first few ‘strategies’ discussed, but as this discussion proceeds, sovereignty over their brand is gradually reduced. Ironically, the avoidance antidotes in which the organisation possesses the most control may actually be less effective in alleviating brand avoidance than the strategies where the organisation relinquishes control of their brand; however, this contention is based solely on the data obtained from the current group of participants. Table 16 displays the level of control and likelihood of success for the various avoidance antidotes. Note that the final theme ‘incurable avoidance’ has been excluded from Table 16, since it is not an avoidance antidote *per se*.


High degree of organisational control Lower likelihood of success	Transforming promises	Genuine adaptation
	Diversifying promises	Sub-branding
	Enhancing promises	Value augmentation
		Image adaptation
		Network formation
		Positive WOM
		Restoring promises
Low degree of organisational control Higher likelihood of success		

Table 16 The degree of organisational control and the likelihood of success for avoidance antidotes.

4.1.1 Main theme: Transforming promises

The central argument of this thesis is that when consumers perceive a brand promise to be negative, it may result in brand avoidance. Thus, by transforming the brand promise, and its associated meanings, consumers may be convinced to reselect the brand. The main method of transforming a brand promise is for the brand to undergo a ‘genuine adaptation’.

4.1.1.1 Sub theme: *Genuine adaptation*

If the main reason for avoiding a brand is ideological (moral avoidance) some participants suggest that their avoidance may be alleviated if a solemn attempt to change the brand, and its faults, is initiated from the highest point within the company. Furthermore, this change must also permeate throughout the entire brand/organisation. Thus, when participants disidentify with an organisation owing to corporate irresponsibility, or base their avoidance on consumer resistance philosophies, the company could attempt a 'genuine adaptation' of their brand/company:

I've sort of had these [attitudes] now for a good ten years; I've always made it a point to be aware of these things. I think unless something radical happens I think probably my attitude towards it would be the same. If suddenly it was flashing news that Shell oil had a new owner that was going to donate 20% of their profits to environmental organisations and do this and do that, then bugger me, I'd be buying Shell petrol completely.

DS Int 15 (Male, 30)

DS practices moral avoidance of *Shell*, owing to its degradation of the environment (sub theme corporate irresponsibility), and attempts to avoid *Shell* as consistently as possible. He suggests that unless 'something radical' occurs his attitude towards the brand would continue to be negative. If the company conducts 'genuine adaptation' of its policies and practices, in other words, transforms its negative brand promises, DS would no longer have a reason to disidentify with *Shell* and as a consequence might stop his brand avoidance behaviour.

However, such an extensive change is unlikely to take place unless brand avoidance was to become widespread in the company's main target market, but by then, even a 'genuine adaptation' may be too late. Thus, transforming brand promises may be a very difficult task indeed. Often, the ideas related to genuine adaptation are more idealistic than practical, with many of the participants acknowledging the difficulty of accomplishing such a major change within a company:

Maybe if United [Airlines] established a base here and started using New Zealand services to service their planes or you know, focus and commitment to New Zealand market or started employing New Zealander's or something like that, that would go more towards countering their nationalistic part of it. (*Interviewer: And is there anything America could do in general?*) Revamp foreign policy. I don't know, do something magnificent and humanitarian, I don't know, solve the

Palestinian and Israeli problem... reduce their carbon omissions, stuff like that, it all adds up.

AP Int 9 (Male 30)

Once again, lack of CSR and COO effects were the main reasons for AP's moral avoidance of *United Airlines*. If the brand and the country associated with the brand 'revamped' their policies and contributed to the local economy, AP's avoidance of *United Airlines* may possibly be alleviated. However, the reference of 'I don't know' by AP conveys that his suggestions are more along the lines of 'what would be nice' rather than 'what would be practical'.

Indeed, most participants that inform this theme assert that the change must be perceived to be different from mere damage-control tactics. Yet even if an organisation achieves genuine adaptation of its brand, some participants still remain guarded. The participant below expresses his suspicion of *Shell*. After acknowledging that the brand has attempted to right its wrongs, he finds additional counter-arguments that detract from the company's newly established goodwill:

Increasingly, Shell after that fiasco they've had, they've began to market themselves as [an] environment friendly and sound company, in terms of their operations. Every month in national geography they put a big sign, a two page spread saying the goodness of Shell or they profile bigger scientists that work for Shell and they tell us a little bit about what they do and how they're helping the environment. So they're trying to change their public image quite actively I think, and they haven't been in the news since. So they must have done something right, because bad news is good news and if they're not in the news it means they're doing something good. But even so... I would still regard it as an iffy question for Shell... (*Interviewer: So what would it take for them to change your mind?*) Probably to make my car go faster, that's the practical purposes. Mind you, when they announce petrol increases, they are the first people to put their prices up, so that undermines any good that they've created in my opinion. I think that two nights ago they announced that the petrol was going to increase by another five cents. Shell was one of the first people to announce that... they seem to be the market leaders in that regard, which is a bad thing.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

The suspicion expressed by RH could be linked to the concept of consumer cynicism, discussed earlier in the moral avoidance section, and means that, in reality, 'genuine adaptation' would be very difficult to put into practice. Thus, although a genuine and idealistic transformation of the brand may be considered by some participants as the 'right thing' to do, realistically, it may not be a practical strategy with which to remedy brand avoidance because of two reasons. First, for the sake of

pleasing a relatively small number of complainers, such a large scale change would not be considered feasible for most large multi-nationals. Given the tenuous success rate and the huge expenses associated with re-branding a corporation (Kaikati and Kaikati 2003; Stuart and Muzellec 2004), there is actually little incentive for large organisations to implement 'genuine adaptation', unless substantial segments of their target consumers begin to practice moral avoidance of a brand. Second, even if such a transformation is undertaken, owing to the cynicism that some consumers have towards the brands which they already avoid, the change would not be perceived as sincere, as demonstrated by the previous quote.

4.1.2 Main theme: Diversifying promises

If the manager considers the genuine adaptation of a brand to be too difficult or unrealistic, then the diversification of brand promises may be a more practical method of managing the negative promises associated with an avoided brand. By expanding the company's brand portfolio, the company is able to create new promises that may not be perceived, by the same consumer, as negative. These brand promises are dissociated from the avoided brand, and, as a result, the company may be able to bypass some consumers' brand avoidance behaviours and attitudes.

4.1.2.1 Sub theme: Sub-branding

Sub-branding emerged as a potential strategy that firms may use as a means of diversifying their brand promises. The ability to avoid certain brands may be restricted when that company also possesses sub-brands, especially if the participant is not aware of the relationship between the sub-brand and the avoided brand. In general, sub-branding is a strategy that allows one brand to remain the same while another brand is created by the same company for a variety of strategic reasons. For instance, if there is reason to suspect that consumer perceptions of a new product extension might impact negatively on the equity of a main brand, sub-branding may be used in place of a brand extension strategy. In such circumstances, consumers are less likely to associate a sub-brand, and any potentially negative associations, with the main brand (Milberg, Whan Park, and McCarthy 1997). A sub-brand may also be used to penetrate a new market segment by indicating to the consumer that the main brand has been augmented by an additional brand with specialised attributes; for example, *Gillette Mach 3* or *Honda Accord* (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Bhat, Kelley, and O'Donnell 1998).

This thesis contends that avoidance of the company's main brand may not extend to its sub-brands. Since a sub-brand has a different set of values and associations to the avoided brand, a consumer who avoids the target brand may react differently to the sub-brand. Thus, even though avoidance of the target brand may persist, the parent company could still stand to profit from the consumer if he or she selects any of the firm's sub-brands. Additionally, sub-branding minimises the risk of losing existing customers because the main brand remains unaltered.

Introduce a new, a line of brands, that might stand out from the others... if Glasson's would introduce... something new, like a businesswoman range... if I'm attracted to that brand, that would definitely change my view and I would probably visit... so they'd sell the sub brand which is again Glasson's, but it's a new sub brand and if I'm convinced that it's better quality, somehow better.

JJ Int 3 (Female, 25)

JJ's avoids *Glassons*, a mainstream clothing store, because she associates the brand with teenage girls, which is an avoidance group for her (identity avoidance). However, as JJ suggests, if a 'businesswomen' sub-brand exists, her negative view of *Glassons* may change. Since the promises conveyed by the sub-brand would be separate from the symbolically unappealing brand promises of *Glassons*, if JJ purchases clothes from the sub-brand, the profit still proceeds to the parent company. Furthermore, because the sub-brand should not affect the *Glassons* brand, the relationship between the core target market and *Glassons* should not be adversely affected.

There are many ways in which a firm may use its brands to create value and, typically, a company's brand portfolio may be arranged on a continuum. At one end is a monolithic/corporate branding strategy, where the company's name is promoted as the main brand, for example *McDonald's*. In the middle of the continuum is a mixed brand or family/umbrella strategy where a main brand is used in conjunction with other sub-brands, such as *3M* and *3M Scotch*. Finally, a house-of-brands, or individual branding, strategy is utilised when the company brand name is less noticeable; for example, both *Crest* and *Pampers* are brands marketed by *Procter and Gamble* (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Devlin 2003; Laforet and Saunders 1994; Laforet and Saunders 1999; Rao, Agarwal, and Dahlhoff 2004).

The different methods of managing an organisation's brand portfolio are accompanied by various pros and cons. A corporate branding strategy enables the firm to leverage off an existing brand, overcome advertising clutter, reduce

promotional costs through economies of scale, and be perceived as more stable by financial investors. On the other hand, a house-of-brands strategy enables the firm to diversify their target segments, increase shelf space dominance, and protect their main brands by spreading risk across a variety of brands (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Bhat et al. 1998; Laforet and Saunders 1999; Rao et al. 2004). In terms of this thesis, the house-of-brands strategy enables a firm to diversify its brand promises.

A rarely mentioned house-of-brands strategy that is relevant to this chapter on managing brand avoidance, is the concept of a 'furtive' sub-brand (Laforet and Saunders 1994; 1999). In a furtive sub-branding strategy, the brand and the corporation are deliberately distanced from one another. This strategy is suggested to be useful when one brand needs to be isolated or decentralised from the company and its other brands. There are two main reasons for furtive brands. First, they are used when product categories are highly incompatible; for instance, if a company produces both pet food and confectionery. Second, a furtive sub-branding strategy may be used to distance the company from adverse publicity; for instance, *Shell* is often accused of corporate irresponsibility and environmental degradation (both in this study and others). In contrast, despite being involved in equally contentious industries, other corporate brands (e.g. *Rio Tinto Zinc*) remain virtually unknown to everyday consumers due to their practice of furtive sub-branding (Laforet and Saunders 1994; 1999).

In terms of this thesis, anti-hegemony (moral avoidance) was motivated by the perceived dominance of certain brands. A monolithic/corporate branding strategy may be one reason contributing to these avoidance attitudes, since the omnipotence of a single brand may instigate negative responses from certain consumers. In those situations, the use of furtive sub-brands may give some consumers the illusion that they are selecting a competing brand, when in fact both brands are owned by the same company (Laforet and Saunders 1994; 1999).

It's the taste and the fact that it's such a big company... If I drank fizzy drink I would rather L&P because I associate it with being made in, being a New Zealand company or whatever. Coke there must be some coke made in New Zealand mustn't there? (*Interviewer: L&P is a sub-brand of coke.*) Oh is it? So I naively just bought that anyway... really? Oh that sucks.

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

KB avoids coke for two reasons. The first is an experiential reason; KB does not like the taste of the product. The second reason is based on moral avoidance, where

Coke is avoided because of its perceived dominance (monopoly resistance). KB suggests that if she wanted to consume a soft drink, she would select an underdog brand, a brand that she believes to be independent and therefore a competitor of *Coke*. However, in reality, *L&P* is one of the many sub-brands that *The Coca-Cola Company* produces. Thus, by possessing a diversified range of brand promises, *The Coca-Cola Company* is able to bypass KB's avoidance of its main brand *Coke*.⁴

Sub-branding is able to address brand avoidance by creating perceptual distance between the firm's avoided brand and its other sub-brands. Additionally, sub-brands may also allow the parent company to tap into a new market without altering the existing associations of the main brand. However, the cost of creating a new brand is significant. Thus, sub-branding or a furtive branding should only be considered if the market for such brands is large enough to support the endeavour (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). As an avoidance antidote, sub-branding should only be attempted if there are a large number of consumers avoiding the brand for similar reasons. In such circumstances, brand avoidance may be managed by the diversification of brand promises. The intention is that the avoidance attitudes and behaviour towards the avoided brand, and its negative brand promises, do not transfer to the firm's other sub-brands.

4.1.3 Main theme: Enhancing promises

As the preceding themes indicate, if the company wishes to transform its brand promise, a pervasive adaptation of the brand is required. However, this may be too grandiose a strategy, with little return on investment for the company instigating the change. Similarly, the diversification of brand promises through sub-branding also involves the investment of considerable resources. Although the task of transforming and diversifying negative brand promises seems daunting, the majority of quotes that helped inform this chapter on 'avoidance antidotes' actually involved less drastic alterations to the brand. The following strategies may offer more practical solutions to brand avoidance, in that they aim to 'enhance' negative brand promises rather than transforming them completely or creating entirely new brand promises through sub-branding.

⁴ Use of the term 'furtive branding' is based on the consumer's perspective; hence, whether a company purposely implemented a furtive strategy or not was irrelevant. Instead, the researcher was more interested in the scenarios where the consumer was not aware that certain sub-brands belonged to the same company.

Four sub themes emerged that may be utilised as strategies to 'enhance' the negative promises of an avoided brand: value augmentation, image adaptation, network formation, and positive word of mouth (WOM).

4.1.3.1 Sub theme: Value augmentation

In 'deficit-value avoidance', the lack of value, or a low benefit to cost ratio, was an underlying property of the main theme 'unacceptable trade-off', and was a major reason for participants' avoidance of brands. Logically, a strategy that addresses value inadequate brand promises is suggested by participants as a method of regaining their patronage.

The majority of brand purchase decisions involve a trade off between quality and price (Hoch 1996). Thus, the two most prominent ways of augmenting perceived value may be to amplify the quality associations of the brand, or attenuate the cost of the brand. Although value and quality are two related but distinct concepts (Zeithaml 1988), in general, if the promise of quality increases while cost or sacrifices remain constant or decrease, the perception of value tends to be enhanced (Dodds et al. 1991; Grewal et al. 1998; Monroe and Chapman 1987; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Zeithaml 1988). This proposition is simply summed up by the following remark:

McDonald's - they'd need to start serving good food...

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

Thus, by improving the quality of its product, while holding the price constant, the brand promise, which AP perceives as inadequate, may be enhanced, and *McDonald's* may be able to convince AP to reselect its brand.

Though not easy, bridging the various 'gaps' between what the consumer expects and what they believe can be delivered is a major step in improving perceptions of quality (Parasuraman et al. 1985). However, as Aaker (1996) states, once a reputation for poor quality has been established, it is often difficult to change consumers' perceptions. Certainly, in this thesis, if a participant avoids a brand due to his/her perceptions of poor quality, it is not enough to simply change the quality of the product or service; that participant must be made aware of the change:

Probably convincing that it is durable, it is good quality and stuff... I suppose through ads, commercials, flyers, word of mouth, they should try and get people to wear the stuff before they start selling it I guess, so they can be like a walking advertisement.

MO Int 19 (Female, 31)

In order for her brand avoidance to be alleviated, MO needs to be 'convinced' that the quality of the brand is 'good and durable'.

In addition to increasing actual quality, participants' perceptions of quality may also need to be altered. This brand promise enhancement can be accomplished by either focusing on the 'cues' or evaluative criteria customers use to gauge quality, or by educating the customers in the importance of alternate criteria in which the company already possesses higher quality (Aaker 1996). The classic Fishbein attitudinal model can be strategically implemented in such a fashion (Fishbein and Ajzen 1972).

Although improving the quality of a brand's product or services may be an obvious strategy for alleviating brand avoidance, doing so is a fairly difficult task. Loss aversion theory suggests that consumers are more motivated to avoid losses than attain gains (Tversky and Kahneman 1991). Following this line of reasoning, any long term increase in quality is likely to require an associated increase in price, which would be perceived as a loss of money from the consumer's perspective. A temporary reduction in price however, may be implemented without an associated loss in quality; thus, from the consumer's perspective, this attenuation in cost involves no loss. Moreover, it has been shown that prior to a consumption experience, an improvement of quality is difficult to prove. In contrast, a drop in price is easily conveyed to consumers (Hansen, Samuelsen, and Lorentzen 2004). These reasons may be why many 'value augmentation' strategies reduce cost rather than increase quality.

The cost, or sacrifice, an individual is required to 'give' is the other side of the value trade-off equation (Dodds et al. 1991; Grewal et al. 1998; Monroe and Chapman 1987; Parasuraman and Grewal 2000; Zeithaml 1988). Thus, logically, if the increase of quality is not feasible on the part of the avoided brand, then a drop in price may have a similarly positive effect on the perception of value and the enhancement of perceived negative brand promises. That is, if the quality/performance of the product or service remains the same, but the cost to the consumer is attenuated, then the perception of value should be enhanced. Several methods exist for reducing the perceived sacrifice: sales, 'deals', discounts, coupons, promotions, and rebates (Chandon et al. 2000; Monroe and Chapman 1987). The underlying objective of all of those promotional methods is to attenuate the cost of a transaction, which in turn increases the perception of value, thereby resulting in an enhanced brand promise.

(Interviewer: What would it take to change your attitudes for some of the brands that you said you avoided?) A very very good price... I would probably give it a go if it's extremely cheap like 50% cheaper.

KL Int 11 (Male, 20)

The Amazon thing was the one thing that I bought for myself out of [a] binge last year some time, yeah... it was on sale. It was a \$200 skirt cut down to \$50, so it was quite cool, so I thought "Hey that will do me".

KD Int 6 (Female, 17)

For KL, a drop in price may alleviate his brand avoidance behaviour, and KD stopped her avoidance of the target brand when it was on sale. Hence, when the costs of their target brands were reduced, and the value inadequate promises of those brands enhanced, both participants' brand avoidance behaviours were more likely to be alleviated.

There is concern from some practitioners that long term price promotions may reduce equity in hedonic brands, owing to the perception of a drop in quality when brands are continuously discounted (Chandon et al. 2000). However, a reduction in price increases the likelihood of purchase by contributing more to the consumption experience than merely the attraction of a lower fee. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that apart from lowering the monetary sacrifice in an exchange, sales promotions may also increase value by providing hedonic benefits, such as the enjoyment of finding a 'good deal' or the ability to express the individual's values of frugality (Belch and Belch 2004; Chandon et al. 2000; Chitty et al. 2005). Additionally, when in a sales promotion environment, consumers feel less need to compare prices across various alternatives; therefore, other costs, such as time and effort, are also temporarily reduced when sales promotions are implemented (Chandon et al. 2000). Although the majority of this study's participants suggest that a drop in price would alleviate their brand avoidance attitudes and/or behaviours, as an avoidance antidote, 'cost attenuation' does not need to focus solely on monetary reduction. For instance, reducing the time or effort of purchasing a brand may also increase perceptions of value, enhance the brand promise, and as a consequence, remedy existing brand avoidance behaviours.

In terms of alleviating brand avoidance, the success of cost attenuation may depend on the reason why a brand is avoided in the first place. If a brand is avoided due to an 'unacceptable trade-off' (deficit-value avoidance), then cost attenuation may be a potential avoidance antidote. In contrast, if the brand is avoided due to 'undesired self' or 'moral avoidance', then it is less likely that an increase in perceived functional

value would be enough to alleviate the individual's avoidance attitudes, though it might still work to restrict their behavioural avoidance:

Maybe if I saw advertising or I heard that they were really cheap and really good, I mean all of these things are subject to review. The airlines example, maybe if they increased their seat room by 50% or they've cut business class prices by 50% or something, I don't know, it has to be something pretty major... McDonald's, it would have to be dramatic and I would still try and avoid them, but it's harder if it's so much cheaper. Cause, I mean, it's not that some of these things are overpriced already, McDonald's isn't overpriced.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

The close relationship between costs (a 50% drop in price) and benefits (a 50% increase in seating room) is illustrated by AP. The impact that a reduction of cost has on brand avoidance behaviour is also highlighted when AP asserts that it becomes 'harder' to resist a brand if it is perceived to be 'cheaper' while everything else remains constant.

However, cost attenuation may only succeed if the brand's competitive offering is not already 'low price'. Previous research indicates that consumers are more likely to respond to price reductions in high quality, rather than low quality, brands, the reason being that the attenuation of cost in high quality brands allows consumers to sacrifice less money without the loss of quality. In contrast, though a price reduction in low quality brands also allow consumers to sacrifice less money, it involves the loss of quality, as the consumer would need to 'switch down' to a brand of lesser quality. National brands (high quality high price) are more likely to benefit from sales promotions than private brands (low quality low price) (Sivakumar and Raj 1997). Similarly, this thesis contends that a cost attenuation strategy is likely to have little effect in alleviating the brand avoidance of lower tier brands. Since the reason for avoidance was often perceptions of low quality rather than high monetary cost, lowering the price does not address the original problem of substandard quality. Furthermore, since the price of the brand is already low, participants may not consider an even lower price to be a real benefit.

Though value augmentation may be more practical and less complicated than genuine adaptation, altering the value proposition of a brand is still a fairly difficult task to manage; the reason being that long term value augmentation requires either cost attenuation accompanied by stable quality, or an improvement in the performance of the brand accompanied by stable cost. A temporary reduction in cost may be enough to encourage the consumer to re-purchase a brand, but this strategy

is only effective if the quality of brand is able to meet or exceed the consumer's expectations. Additionally, any cost attenuation or quality amplification strategy will reduce the potential profit of the company in the short term. In cost attenuation, profit margins are not as large as they could be; while in quality augmentation, the improvement of any product or service is likely to incur a cost to the company (Sivakumar and Raj 1997).

Finally, it should be noted that if the majority of the brand's target market is happy with the brand's value trade-off, there is no reason for a company to change the costing structure or quality of its brand in an attempt to manage the brand avoidance behaviours of a small group of consumers.

4.1.3.2 Sub theme: Image adaptation

Since value augmentation is not an easy task, a short term and less arduous method of enhancing negative brand promises may be to alter the superficial image of the brand. This section discusses 'image adaptation' as a possible method of reducing the negative perceptions some consumers may have of a brand. In identity avoidance, the relationship between a person's self-concept and a brand's image was discussed. Image congruency theory posits that people are more likely to purchase brands that improve or maintain their self-concept, and avoid brands that represent an undesired self-concept (Dolich 1969; Graeff 1997; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Heath and Scott 1998; Hogg et al. 2000; Sirgy 1982). Similarly, organisational disidentification theory suggests that people will try to distance themselves from organisations where an inconsistency exists between the individual's self-identity and the organisation's image, attributes, values, policies, ideologies and practices (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Therefore, changing the superficial representation of a brand is another potential strategy that a company could execute, in an attempt to change brand avoidance. It is also a strategy in which the organisation maintains control over the brand.

Although there is an obvious link between 'image adaptation' and 'genuine adaptation', the scope of change to the brand/company is what distinguishes the two avoidance antidotes. While 'genuine adaptation' requires an extensive transformation of the entire organisation, including a restructuring of the company's policies and

practices, 'image adaptation' only involves a superficial enhancement of how the brand promise is perceived by consumers.⁵

Re-branding literature posits that a company may re-brand itself along a continuum. At one end, is an extensive 'revolutionary' re-branding, involving a simultaneous change of name, logo, and slogan. This type of transformation is more likely to accompany a 'genuine adaptation', discussed earlier. A less pervasive form of re-branding is 'evolutionary' change, involving the solitary modification of a name, logo, or slogan (Stuart and Muzellec 2004). The current 'image adaptation' sub theme is more akin to the 'evolutionary' re-branding strategy.

Similarly, Balmer (2001) distinguishes 'corporate identity' from 'corporate image'; the former is defined as a mix of elements that gives an organisation its characteristics, while the latter is the perception of the company in peoples' minds. While 'genuine adaptation' would involve a change in corporate identity, 'image adaptation' addresses a less extensive alteration of corporate image. The following quote is an example of 'image adaptation':

Something to indicate... some sort of change in their image or whatever... it would probably be enough for me to at least try the clothes (*Interviewer: What do you mean by image?*) to do with the image of the store... their identity... conveying a different message from before... if they'd change their actual store, like if they'd made it more styley, that would stand out from the others... even if they'd only make a minimal change to do with the actual clothes that they sell... if they make an impact with the visual identity, I think that would definitely be worthwhile... not necessarily a big change but if they attract the people just by showing that they'd changed their stores and hence changed their quality or the type of clothes... it would make a big impact... putting more into that, rather than the actual change in quality or style (*Interviewer: So they wouldn't need to change the actual range of clothes?*) Yeah. In a way you'd consider that almost an advertising trick... it might work for masses, but I know that in my case I would be... "Okay they didn't really change much... Oh they've changed their store, it's really cool... I'll just try this", but again it doesn't fit me... and it's not really my style... it'd probably just be a short lasting effect on me and I'd probably again start avoiding them.

JJ Int 3 (Female, 25)

⁵ The present use of the term 'image' is less complex than Keller's (1993) concept of brand image, which encompasses a myriad of factors ranging from non-product related attributes of packaging, through to the various conceptualisations of brand associations. By 'image', this researcher refers to the superficial perceptions a consumer has of the avoided brand.

Ironically, JJ admits that even a superficial change of image may be enough to offset her current avoidance attitudes. JJ believes that it may be worthwhile to change the aesthetic appeal or 'visual identity' of the store and the clothes, rather than the actual quality or style. However, she then confesses that such a change may only have a temporary effect on her brand avoidance behaviour. Thus, 'image adaptation', like the previous avoidance antidotes, may also be subject to consumer scepticism.

In terms of this thesis, most participants who inform this category refer to retail brands. Therefore, 'image adaptation' may be most suitable in situations where the negative brand promises associated with 'negative store environment' (experiential avoidance) and 'aesthetic insufficiency' (deficit-value avoidance) require enhancing.

If it was The Warehouse, if it was clothes they'd have to change the whole thing, the way they've got everything piled up on massive racks everywhere, and no obvious changing rooms... it would have to be completely done into a more traditional type of shop I guess, not in one great big warehouse.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

JH suggests that his avoidance of *The Warehouse* would be remedied if the image of the store environment was modified. However, in much of JH's interview he was also observed to avoid *The Warehouse* for many other reasons, such as 'unacceptable trade-off', 'undesired self', and 'poor performance'. Thus, it is unlikely that a small adaptation of *The Warehouse's* brand image will have any long term effect on JH's brand avoidance behaviour. JH is simply not in the target market of *The Warehouse* and as such his opinions though interesting, cannot be used to generalise beyond the context of this thesis.

At a theoretical level, 'image adaptation' may alleviate brand avoidance if a person avoids a brand due to the negative perception of brand image. However, from a practical perspective, 'image adaptation' may not be a wise decision if there are more people (in the target market) who identify with the existing brand image than those who do not. Thus, although it is important for a company to know how the brand is perceived in general, it is more important to take into account the actual influence of those people. If the majority of target consumers are satisfied, then there is no need for the company to risk its strategic positioning by appeasing a small number of people who are not a part of the target market.

The purpose of re-branding is to signal some sort of change to the market (Stuart and Muzellec 2004). In the case of brand avoidance, that change, whether large or

small, should convey to the consumer that their initial reasons for avoiding the brand may no longer be valid. The main risk associated with 'image adaptation' is the fact that brands, and their promises, are not meant to appeal to everyone (Gardner and Levy 1955; Ward, Light, and Goldstine 1999). Thus, in some cases, the reasons why one group chooses to avoid a brand might be the same reasons for its success within another segment of consumers. Therefore, avoidance antidotes that require less change to the original brand, yet allow the firm to address brand avoidance, should also be considered.

4.1.3.3 Sub theme: Network formation

Within a business setting, the term 'network' is used to describe any pattern of relationships between firms which are relatively stable, yet not rigidly fixed (Tidd 1995), and may encompass many different strategies involving more than one organisation. The purpose of a business network or business alliance is to enhance the efficiency of all actors involved (Anderson, Håkansson, and Johanson 1994). Thus, if the broad definitions above are used, networks could also encompass more specific co-operative business arrangements such as co-branding, joint promotions, sponsorship, alliances, and joint ventures (Blackett and Boad 1999). Business alliances are similarly defined as "an ongoing, formal, business relationship between two or more firms for some agreed purpose... [whereby] the relationship is more than a standard customer-supplier relationship... but falls short of an outright acquisition" (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1992 p.72). The purpose of the co-operative arrangement is to improve performance and add value to each party. These objectives are achieved by allowing access to both tangible and intangible resources, not usually available to single firms, and also by allowing the firms to learn techniques of alliance management (Ireland, Hitt, and Vaidyanath 2002). Alliances with a well known brand have been proposed as a successful strategy for increasing the competitiveness of a less well-known brand (Shocker, Srivastava, and Ruekert 1994).

The purpose of this discussion is not to debate the formal definitions of a business alliance, network, dyadic exchange, or relationship. This task has been the domain of previous academics (Achrol, 1997; Anderson, Hakansson, and Johanson, 1994). Nor is this study's conceptualisation of 'network ubiquity' limited to Sheth and Parvatiyar's (1992) classification of business alliances: competitive alliance, collaborative venture, cartel, and co-operative. In this thesis, the sub theme of 'network formation' is applicable across all of Sheth and Parvatiyar's (1992) four alliances. The underlying property of 'network formation', as an avoidance antidote, is the alleviation of brand

avoidance because of the relationships a target brand has established with other companies/brands.

Lufthansa, yeah I was really disappointed, but I'll probably go for them again because of the way it works... because of the whole package, if you don't fly Lufthansa you have to change the first provider as well, and you have to change the flight, and you have to change places... If I can get the same thing with another company, I would avoid them.

LB Int 1 (Female, 52)

Although LB was disappointed with *Lufthansa*, and would like to avoid that brand, in her own words, the way in which the 'whole package' 'works', creates a real restriction to her brand avoidance. It appears that her aversion towards the effort involved in changing the first provider, connecting flight, and stopover is more than her desire to avoid the brand. By positioning themselves within a large network, such as the *Star Alliance*, airline brands make it more difficult for consumers to use competing brands and, thus, are able to manage brand avoidance, even when consumers are dissatisfied. So, until LB's brand avoidance attitude towards *Lufthansa* becomes greater than the perceived difficulty of changing networks, and she possesses enough power to follow through on her attitudes, her avoidance of *Lufthansa* will be restricted.

Thus, as an avoidance antidote, 'network formation' consists of the incidents where brand avoidance is managed by forming an association between a target brand and another brand. The formation of such business networks may restrict brand avoidance in several ways. First, as already shown above, being part of a well-established network protects a brand from being avoided, by creating exit barriers such as increasing the difficulty of using a competitor or magnifying the perceived cost of leaving the network. In other words, network formation increases inertia and perceived switching costs. Second, in the modern day marketing environment, "the best products do not necessarily win. The best-networked ones usually do" (Srivastava et al., 2001, pg. 784). This statement suggests that products, services, and brands seldom work in isolation, thus, in terms of this thesis; brand avoidance may be restricted from occurring, simply because of the brand's ubiquity. In other words, network formation alleviates brand avoidance by simply making the brand difficult to avoid:

Yeah I definitely avoid coke [Earlier] ... Whenever I would have last had a rum and Coke, I'm sure it had Coke in it...

KB Int 10 (Female, 27)

(Interviewer: *Why do you avoid coke?*) Don't like the product...
(Interviewer: *When was the last time you chose to buy it?*) A couple of weeks ago. Would have been with a combo meal at McDonald's, something like that.

AP Int 9 (Male, 30)

Both KB and AP would like to avoid *Coke* for various reasons; however, the business networks in which *Coke* has positioned itself creates a considerable obstacle to their avoidance intentions. In KB's case, the brand has become ubiquitous by infiltrating the network of bars and pubs common to KB's social environment. The brand is the most commonly used cola mixer in the bars that KB frequents and when she chooses to drink a 'rum and coke' she inadvertently purchases a brand she would rather avoid.

For AP, the business relationship between *Coke* and *McDonald's* means that *Coke* is positioned as the standard drink that accompanies any *McDonald's* combo. Unless another brand of soft-drink is requested, *Coke* will automatically be bundled with AP's combo meal. Even if another brand is requested, the majority of alternate soft drinks available at *McDonald's* are also owned by the *Coca-Cola Company*, so unless AP foregoes purchasing drinks with his meals at *McDonald's*, he will not be able to carry through his attitudinal intention to avoid *Coke*.

Implicit in all of the quotes above, is a balance between how much the individual dislikes a brand, and therefore desires to avoid it, versus the inconvenience involved in actually avoiding the brand. Having well established business relationships with other companies makes a target brand more difficult to avoid than if it were isolated. Once the network, and the brand in which it is positioned, becomes dominant in an industry, it becomes very difficult for the consumer to avoid the target brand because it is harder to purchase a competitor's brand. Thus, network formation increases the level of inertia and the apparent switching costs for a consumer, reduces the perceived number of suitable alternatives, and extends the brand's realm of influence.

A final way in which the formation of a network, between an avoided brand and a more favourable brand, may work to alleviate brand avoidance is by enhancing the brand promise of the avoided brand. The concept of co-branding is required to explain this last element of network formation. "Co-branding is a form of co-operation between two or more brands with significant customer recognition, in which all of the participant' brand names are retained" (Blackett and Boad 1999 p.7). The underlying essence of co-branding is the enhancement of a brand/company through being

associated with another brand/company (Aaker 1996; Blackett and Boad 1999; Grossman 1997). If a business network is defined as a set of relationships between firms (Anderson et al. 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1992; Tidd 1995), then co-branding could be considered a type of business network formation.

Certainly, in this thesis, network formation/co-branding emerged as a further strategy that could be utilised to enhance a negative brand promise, and therefore, manage brand avoidance. The participant below suggested that his avoidance of a retailer might be alleviated if a reputable manufacturer/brand could be purchased from the retail brand.

I'm more prepared to have a look if it's the same brand as elsewhere and they're offering the same thing, just cheaper. I think by all means I would look at that and I guess The Warehouse are pretty good with returns and stuff, so I guess that is a bonus over other places. It's just some of their brands that you may not have heard of... you don't really know the quality of... [If] I've seen that brand elsewhere and I know a bit about it, I'd go ahead and buy it. (*Interviewer: And at that point would you say it's still from The Warehouse or is it different now?*) No, still from The Warehouse, but I think that then it's kind of associated with the brand name rather than the retail stores name. Cause if it's sold in a variety of places and it's exactly the same product then I think then it's not kind of attached to one store.

SW Int 17 (Male, 24)

SW refers not only to the positive influence of a successful network formation between a retailer and a manufacturer, but also alludes to a co-branding effect. SW's evaluation and, perhaps, his avoidance of *The Warehouse* may be alleviated through the association of the target brand with another brand. In SW's case, avoidance may cease if the negative brand promises of *The Warehouse* are enhanced by a network relationship with a high quality product brand, such as *Sony*.

Of course such a strategy could back-fire if, for example, the target market for *The Warehouse* believes that, since forming a business relationship with *Sony*, *The Warehouse* has moved upmarket and now stocks less affordable products. Thus, the brand manager must decide whether the net gain of new customers, as a result of enhancing the brand promise, is greater than the net loss of the original target market.

A further disadvantage of network formation is the reduced control that the firm has over its own brands, once they are entered into a business network and forced to co-exist with other brands (Anderson et al. 1994). Thus, when implementing network

formation as a strategy, the firm must be comfortable with allowing their brand to be influenced by another company.

Finally, forming network relationships may not always result in positive outcomes for the brands involved; in fact, joining a network may sometimes have “deleterious effects on network identity” for a firm (Anderson et al. 1994 p.8). Certainly, the formation of a relationship with a more favourable brand might be a beneficial strategy for enhancing promises and alleviating brand avoidance. However, the consequences of any ‘spill-over’ or ‘dilution’ effects (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Simonin and Ruth 1998) from the avoided brand to the favourable brand should be considered by the latter.

4.1.3.4 Sub theme: Positive word of mouth (WOM)

The less control an organisation has over an avoidance antidote strategy, ironically, the more effective it may be in curing brand avoidance, at least according to the data gathered from the participants of this thesis (Table 16, 176). Hence, positive WOM was revealed as one factor that could enhance negative brand promises and potentially alleviate brand avoidance. The powerful influence of WOM is well recognised in marketing (Arnd 1967; Dichter 1966; Herr et al. 1991; Holmes and Lett Jr. 1977; Naylor and Kleiser 2000; Richins 1983; Roselius 1971; Soloman 2002; Westbrook 1987). Consumers are less wary of the motives and less sceptical of a source that does not have a vested interest, than communication emitted from the firm itself (Dichter 1966; Moorman 1998). Thus, apart from remedying most aspects of brand avoidance, positive WOM may also alleviate symptoms of consumer cynicism, because it is considered trustworthy:

Displays and presentations and that sort of thing, but again that person’s being paid by the company so you can’t always believe them as much. Although they may be telling the honest truth, there’s that influence coming from there, whereas someone else who’s just like family or a friend, then they’re impartial to that company.

SP Int 18 (Male, 23)

The ‘impartial’ nature of WOM, and the fact that it is not ‘influenced’ by the company, makes positive WOM more trustworthy for SP. The effectiveness of WOM may be attributed to SP’s scepticism of the marketing communications that emanate directly from the firm:

Yeah I think it’s a lot better to get it from word of mouth, if you believe all the crap that you see on TV, some of these infomercials, it’s a load of sh*t, they all get paid for doing it and even though they say “This person

wasn't paid, we just picked them out of the crowd", it's a whole bunch of crap and 'Dr Marvin Monroe' or something, it's like "Who the hell is he?" I prefer to take things from people.

SP Int 18 (Male, 23)

In the current research, WOM includes more than communications from friends and family. Similar to previous literature, any informal communication from a source that is perceived to have no material interest in the positive recommendation of the brand may be considered WOM (Dichter 1966; Westbrook 1987). In the statement below, JL considers the opinions of independent consumer guides to be more trustworthy than marketing communications. This view exists because he believes that every company will automatically promote their brands as the best. Thus, his avoidance of a brand could be alleviated if sources, such as consumer guides enhance the negative brand promise by presenting that brand in a favourable light:

These days consumers can get a lot of information from consumer guides, which may have lots of different topics and articles... compares different brands... there are many experts that compare the quality of the sound and image and also the price and availability... (*Interviewer: An independent source?*) Yeah independent, because every product tends to promote themselves as the best in the market.

JL Int 20 (Male, 26)

From the company's point of view, apart from the cost of providing excellent consumption outcomes, WOM is virtually free and highly effective (Arnd 1967; Dichter 1966; Herr et al. 1991), since it is up to informal sources to change the consumer's brand avoidance attitudes. However, the hazard is that the organisation possesses very little control of positive WOM, in regards to both its delivery and its assessment of success (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004). Even stealth marketing tactics, such as the simulation of opinion leaders and the use of manufactured WOM to create 'buzz', depend largely on the continued transmission of WOM by real consumers. As a result, the message risks becoming distorted once it leaves the firm (Kaikati and Kaikati 2004; Solomon 2002). Thus, the only real control an organisation has with regards to WOM is ensuring that its brands perform well.

An interesting point revealed by the data is that despite the power of positive WOM, when compared to negative WOM, the latter appears to be a more powerful influence for some participants. Previous literature also supports this finding that negative WOM and unfavourable information has greater diagnosticity or is given heavier weighting by consumers (Arnd 1967; Herr et al. 1991; Lutz 1975; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990; Mizerski 1982). This effect is especially robust when the

consumer is motivated to make an accurate decision under conditions of limited information (Ahluwalia 2002; Bettman et al. 1998). Certainly, in this study, it appears that the influence of negative WOM is greater on some participants than positive WOM:

(Interviewer: Apart from quality, is there anything else they can do to change your mind, once you've avoided something?) I often hear what my friends say and whether they have tried it a couple of times before... *(Interviewer: So it sounds like the word of mouth from your friends affects your decision?)* Yes, more than what they advertise... because often what they advertise isn't true... sometimes they might exaggerate a bit in order to earn money from the customers. *(Interviewer: Do you have an example of when your friend has said something was good and you adopted that?)* Yes, say for restaurants or some bakery shops. *(Interviewer: Have you got examples of when your friends say something is bad?)* Restaurants as well, say some people say a particular restaurant is just yucky and poor service, I won't go. *(Interviewer: So if someone said something good about a restaurant and someone said something bad about a restaurant, which one do you think affects you more?)* The bad one... if they say it's bad then I won't go, I won't go and try it, but if they say it's good but I've never been to that place and [so] I stick with those certain [restaurants] that I still go [to].

VC Int 8 (Female, 19)

As VC's excerpt illustrates, hearing about a negative experience appears to push a brand immediately to a consumer's inept set. As a result, that brand is no longer considered for purchase since it becomes an 'avoided' brand. In contrast, hearing positive WOM may simply add a brand to the consumer's consideration set. However, there is no guarantee that the brand will be selected, even when positive WOM is heard, because as VC states, she may still prefer to 'stick' with her favourite restaurants. Her sentiments are reiterated by several other participants:

I let other people influence my decision if it's a relatively expensive purchase... something like, a stereo... or a car, someone says "Oh don't buy that, I had a really bad experience" or they show me what's wrong with their current one. .. and it's not a case where I can afford to buy it, try it out for myself, and then if something goes wrong... just go down to the store and get another one. Compared to something like food, I'm more prepared to buy that, try it for myself and see if I like it, because it's a lot cheaper. *(Interviewer: If you had good news about something or bad news about something, which one do you think would affect your behaviour more?)* I think the bad news... because I wouldn't even look at it to begin with whereas if I heard good news then I'd go and look at that, along with some other things.

SW Int17 (Male, 24)

SW's quote shows that he is more likely to listen to WOM when the purchase decision involves an expensive product. Similar to VC, SW suggests that while negative WOM may eliminate a brand from his consideration set instantly, positive WOM could add a brand to several other choices, which he would then have to evaluate. Therefore, this thesis contends that although it is good for a brand to be the focus of positive WOM, it is even more important not to be the target of negative WOM.

People I know and trust, if they tell me they've bought something and it was utter rubbish, or kept breaking down... I probably would avoid it (*Interviewer: If someone tells you something good about something and someone tells you something bad about something, which one do you think would have a bigger impact on you?*) Probably the negative... if someone said "this always breaks down" I wouldn't want to spend my money on it. If it's a case of positive, they say they really like it, it would just be a matter of taste I guess... they might love it and I might not like it, whereas if it's broken it's broken.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

JH reasons that positive WOM is a matter of opinion or 'taste' whereas negative WOM may be more objective because it pertains to the actual performance of the product. Therefore, JH is still more likely to avoid a brand which suffers from negative WOM than approach a brand that receives praise from an informal source.

Finally, previous researchers suggest that negative WOM is more likely to spread owing to the higher motivational levels of dissatisfied customers (Zeelenberg and Pieters 1999) and 'voicing' activities (Andreasen 1985; Andreasen 1993; Halstead 2002; Hirschman 1970). Their findings seem to be corroborated by the following quote:

One of my mates bought a bag from Strandbags a couple of months ago, she had it for a week and the strap came off, she thought 'Sweet I'll just take it back and they can give me a refund'. They refused to give her a refund and I thought that was a bit off so I don't shop at Strandbags anymore... you avoid places that have a bad rep [reputation]. I think people are more likely to complain about bad customer service than they are to go on about good customer service and shops and stuff. Someone's more likely to tell you, "Oh I got the horrible bitch of a sales person today", than they are to come up to you and say 'I had the nicest sales person today, she was great.'

KD Int 6 (Female, 17)

Not only is KD likely to avoid *Strandbags* because of her friend's negative experience, she also suggests that dissatisfied people are more likely to spread negative WOM than satisfied customers are to convey positive WOM.

Positive WOM is an avoidance antidote that, although the organisation has limited control over, may still be effective in enhancing negative brand promises and alleviating brand avoidance. However, the data provide some evidence that the impact of negative WOM may, potentially, be more powerful.

4.1.4 Main theme: Restoring promises

Chapter three revealed that when promises are undelivered, the offending brand may be re-constructed in the mind of a consumer to become a future indicator of a negative consumption experience (experiential avoidance). Thus, one strategy for managing brand avoidance may involve restoring undelivered brand promises. Once the negative promises that are associated with the target brand are restored, customers may be more willing to reselect the brand. The main method of restoring brand promises, which emerged from the data, was through the use of samples.

4.1.4.1 Sub theme: Sampling solution

Although participants may have strong avoidance attitudes towards a brand, some suggest that if they are able to sample the brand at no cost, for instance as a gift, the consumer may be more likely to re-try the brand. If the subsequent consumption experience is favourable they may be more likely to reassess their avoidance attitude. The researcher coded such incidents under 'sampling solution', where the 'sampling' or demonstration of the brand provided a 'solution' for brand avoidance. As Table 16 (page 176) suggests, once the sample is offered to the consumer, the firm loses control of the process. From that point forward, the change in attitude relies on the consumer's new experience of the brand being favourable (Smith and Swinyard 1983).

Previous literatures suggest that consumers normally prefer to base their purchase decisions on the intrinsic attributes of most products such as, actual performance or taste (Heiman et al. 2001; Zeithaml 1988). Yet, unless free samples are being provided or actual consumption takes place, there is usually little opportunity for a consumer to evaluate the intrinsic attributes of any product or service. Thus, in most pre-purchase situations the consumer must rely on extrinsic cues such as price or brand name (Heiman et al. 2001; Zeithaml 1988). However, in the case of brand avoidance, this option is less than optimal. Given that the consumer already

possesses negative associations of the brand, this means that the brand no longer acts as a positive extrinsic cue. Furthermore, the organisation can not expect the consumer to buy the target brand by 'chance' or for novelty seeking purposes, since the consumer is already determined to avoid purchasing that specific brand. Therefore, free samples might be an appropriate avoidance antidote (in some product or service categories) for the management of brand avoidance caused by negative first hand experiences (experiential avoidance) or perceptions of an unacceptable trade-off (deficit-value avoidance).

(Interviewer: What would it take to change your mind in terms of avoidance?) Maybe trying a product not by choice, but somebody offering it... because it's a gift, I'm not going to be rejecting it, and the choice has not been made by me, somebody else made the choice for me... so that being the case, I would try it out and if I liked it then I would start questioning myself "Ok maybe I've been a little over discriminating", so I'd go and try it out again and if I liked it, I'd probably put it back in the good bag and I'd keep selecting it again, I'd make it a habit... There is this drink also by the Coca-Cola company, called Orange Ice or something like that, Orange Spring Water. I didn't like the look of the can, too orangey for me, but somebody offered me the drink and it's actually quite refreshing, it's a mixture of Sprite and a little bit of added lemon and orange... I didn't like it because I never tasted it, because I didn't like the bottle... but somebody offered me a sip of it and I liked it and I've been buying it since.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

RH suggests that avoidance attitudes and behaviours are harder to maintain when the brand is offered to him as a gift. Furthermore, since there is less discrepancy between his own attitudes and behaviour if the 'choice' to consume is taken out of his hands, he is more likely to accept the brand. RH talks about his personal experience with *Orange Ice*. Originally; RH practiced 'aesthetic insufficiency' (deficit-value avoidance) of the brand because he did not like the colour of the can. However, after trying the product he discovered that an intrinsic attribute of the brand, in this case the 'taste', was satisfactory. Thus, a sample of the product alleviated his brand avoidance of *Orange Ice*.

Free samples are a common promotional tactic (Belch and Belch 2004; Chitty et al. 2005), especially in the category of fast moving consumer goods. Most marketers believe that they are effective and previous research has discovered a longer lasting increase in sales, following a free samples promotion (52 weeks), as opposed to a coupon promotion (12 weeks) (Bawa and Shoemaker 2004). This form of promotion is asserted to work particularly well in the introduction of a new product, or to

encourage trial of a brand with a small market share (Bawa and Shoemaker 2004; Heiman et al. 2001). The administration of free samples may even be used to alter the stereotypical user image associated with a product/brand, thereby allowing the brand to penetrate different markets (Bettinger, Dawson Jr., and Wales 1979; Hamm, Perry, and Wynn 1969). In the case of brand avoidance, free samples may provide the company with an opportunity to persuade participants of an improved product. Samples may also be used to convince participants that their prior negative experience was an anomaly; in other words, 'sampling solution' enables the firm to restore a previously undelivered brand promises.

From the consumer's perspective, free samples are ideal in terms of a cost to benefit trade-off. They involve little to no cost and serve as a monetary benefit as well as a risk and uncertainty reducer (Heiman et al. 2001; Roselius 1971; Smith and Swinyard 1983). Offering a free sample works to induce compliance in three ways. First, a demonstration or free product trial enhances the consumer's perception of the service offered by the firm (Heiman et al. 2001). Second, feelings of reciprocity associated with the promotion makes the consumer feel obliged to re-trial the brand (Bawa and Shoemaker 2004). Third, sampling a product may bring about a change of attitude towards the brand. This modification of attitude is caused by cognitive dissonance, the discomfort associated with an imbalance between attitudes and behaviour. In other words, the consumer may feel compelled to hate a brand that he or she is avoiding, yet the act of consuming the sample contradicts his or her attitudes. In order to re-establish psychological balance, the consumer may change his or her attitudes towards the brand, especially since the behaviour has already been performed (Festinger 1957 cited in Solomon 2002). Additionally, an attitude changed in this way is also likely to develop into positive WOM, since one way in which the person is able to convince himself or herself that the brand is good, and that his or her behaviour was justified, is by convincing others (Holmes and Lett Jr. 1977).

As an avoidance antidote, 'sampling solution' does have its limits. Although free samples are evaluated by consumers as being helpful in reducing three types of risk (ego damage, loss of time, and loss of money) the strategy is ineffective in reducing hazard risk (Roselius 1971). Obviously, when a product is perceived to be immediately threatening to the individual's health and well-being, a free sample might not be well received. Similarly, previous literature suggests that some products/services are less conducive to free samples or demonstrations. Typically, products that are difficult or cumbersome to demonstrate, expensive, or require a

long time to learn about and experience fully, do not work well with a sampling strategy (Heiman et al. 2001; Smith and Swinyard 1983).

In terms of managing brand avoidance, it is relatively easy to provide free samples in areas such as fast foods and short term services such as hair-dressing, while demonstrations in the areas of insurance and air travel would be impractical. Furthermore, there is an obvious cost to the firm in terms of giving away free products or conducting multiple demonstrations (Heiman et al. 2001). Thus, the costly nature of sampling also leads to limited exposure in terms of advertising volume (Marks and Kamins 1988). Additionally, Marks and Kamins (1988) posit that the use of free samples might even reverse positive evaluations of a product because it acts as an extrinsic motivator. In other words, instead of thinking “I use the product because I like it”, a free sample may cause the individual to think “I use the product because it was free.”

Ultimately, the greatest risk in any sampling strategy is that the consumer may have a negative experience with the free sample (Heiman et al. 2001). In terms of brand avoidance, not only would the negative brand promise remain undelivered, but such an event would confirm the consumer’s initial concerns/attitudes and may result in even greater avoidance.

In spite of its limitations, previous research indicates that attitudes formed by sampling are more robust and predictive of future behaviour than attitudes formed by presumption and advertisements alone (Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith and Swinyard 1983). Thus, when compared to advertising, the cost of free samples may be argued to be an efficient and justifiable use of the firm’s marketing budget; especially in circumstances where brand avoidance attitudes have been formed by personal experience. Therefore, ‘sampling solution’ may be effective in combating ‘experiential avoidance’, by re-creating a positive consumption experience and restoring the undelivered promises of the prior negative experience. Of course, this is based on the premise that the subsequent consumption experience will, in fact, be positive.

Finally, the use of free samples may be the best way of encouraging the trial of an unfamiliar brand, which the consumer would not normally consider purchasing (Bawa and Shoemaker 2004).

Someone giving me some clothes from there, a present, and I wore it and I thought they’re not actually too bad. An example of that might be Hallenstein’s, I never really bought anything in there, someone gave me

some t-shirts from there and they actually fit reasonably well. Until that point I wouldn't have considered going there and buying anything.

JH Int 13 (Male, 29)

As the passage above illustrates, JH's avoidance of *Hallenstein's* is alleviated by a sample. Prior to that, he was unfamiliar with the brand, never having purchased anything from that clothing store. However, after the gift/sample he is more likely to consider shopping at *Hallenstein's*. JH's quote is an example of how a positive experience provided by a sample may act as a solution to one company's brand avoidance dilemma.

4.1.5 Main theme: Irreconcilable promises

The research questions "what conditions may prevent brand avoidance?" and "what conditions may stop brand avoidance?" resulted in data used to inform this chapter on avoidance antidotes. However, grounded theory analysis of the qualitative data also revealed some cases where participants remained sceptical and cynical of the brand. Therefore, despite attempts to manage brand avoidance, some negative brand promises remain 'irreconcilable'. Thus, the following section addresses the incidents where brand avoidance was claimed to be 'incurable'.⁶

4.1.5.1 Sub theme: Incurable avoidance

'Incurable avoidance' comprises the incidents where negative associations of the brand were so intense that the participants felt it would be nearly impossible for the brand to redeem itself. In other words, any attempt to transform, diversify, enhance, or restore a negative brand promise would be treated with suspicion. Consequently, no foreseeable, and practical, remedies could be implemented to alleviate the consumer's brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours.

Previous research suggests that attitudes formed by high involvement are more likely to be robust than those formed through low involvement (Petty and Cacioppo 1986; Petty and Cacioppo 1979; Petty, Unnave, and Strathman 1991; Zaichkowsky 1985). Likewise, research on negativity bias suggests that negative information tends to be given more weight in certain circumstances than positive information (Ahluwalia 2002; Ahluwalia et al. 2000; Arnd 1967; Bettman et al. 1998; Herr et al. 1991; Lutz 1975; Maheswaran and Meyers-Levy 1990). In terms of this thesis, some brand avoidance attitudes have been formed through the high involvement route, and most

⁶ Although 'incurable avoidance' is not an avoidance antidote per se, it is discussed in this chapter because the data used to inform this theme was predominately gathered by the same research question.

are centred on negative information. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that some brand avoidance attitudes may be quite resistant to change.

I think you'd always remain cynical. Even if they managed to bring around the rest of the consumers out there to their way of thinking, they managed to pull off some big marketing coup, I think once you've gone down that route of avoiding somebody like that, you'll always remain cynical about them and you'd much sooner take on another brand that may be smaller and up and coming.

AR Int 4 (Male, 29)

AR's avoids large multi-national brands; in particular, *Barclays* and *Starbucks* (monopoly resistance). He suggests that even if these organisations are able to 'pull off' marketing communications that convince other consumers to consider their brands, his avoidance of the brand would remain fairly robust. Furthermore, AP claims that he is more likely to purchase another brand than re-select a brand that he has been avoiding.

Similarly, despite many of the avoidance antidotes discussed earlier, other participants also expressed some level of scepticism and cynicism. As VL suggests below, it would be very difficult to convince people of a genuine change in practice:

I think it would be very difficult, once you had a mindset of what that company or that brand stands for... some cosmetic company, just make one up called X and you know that they test on animal babies or something, you've got to demonstrate that they don't and that's very very difficult to do, it would be a very difficult job. It may not be possible to do that.

VL Int 14 (Female, 28)

The comments above raise an interesting situation; a firm may not necessarily need to implement any avoidance antidotes in the first place, especially if they are currently maintaining a successful business and if the number of individuals holding avoidance attitudes towards their brands is relatively small (Reich 1998). It might also be likely that the people who hold avoidance attitudes towards these particular brands may not be part of the target market anyway. These factors, combined with the cynicism of some consumers, especially those with rigidly held beliefs regarding the firm, appear to leave little incentive for the organisation to even bother trying to allay brand avoidance attitudes.

Thus, companies that need to alleviate brand avoidance attitudes are left fighting an up-hill battle. Since they occupy an unfavourable position in some consumers' mindsets, these companies must first convince those consumers that the brand has

changed, and then further convince them to purchase the brand. In contrast, competing brands may already be in a favourable position with this particular group of consumers.

Although companies that suffer from brand avoidance may attempt to address, or appeal to, the consumers who are currently avoiding them, they may face vigorous cynicism. Their negative brand promises may always remain irreconcilable in the minds of the avoidant consumer. Alternatively, these companies may decide not to bother with the negligible group of dissenters, but in doing so, they risk the accumulation of brand avoidance. The old adage 'You can't please everyone' seems to be appropriate for firms in this position. In a study on Anti-*Starbucks* discourse, a similar consumer cynicism was discussed (Thompson and Arsel 2004). In this thesis, *McDonald's* emerged as a brand that many participants felt they would remain cynical about, in spite of attempts to alleviate brand avoidance:

I think Hell would have to freeze over before I go to McDonald's I'm afraid.

VL Int 14 (Female, 24)

VL aptly uses a common colloquialism to illustrate 'incurable avoidance'. Her remark suggests that her avoidance of *McDonald's* will be long-term.

(Interviewer: *What would it take to change your mind towards McDonald's?*) I think for companies like that, the changes that they would need to make would just basically cripple their company, and basically destroy themselves... for things like McDonald's there is also that fundamental line drawn, about monopolising the food... restaurant market, fishing out the little place, destroying that diversification and I think that they can never change that.

DS Int15 (Male, 30)

DS also expresses an incurable avoidance of *McDonald's*. He reasons that the changes required to make him purchase *McDonald's*, on a regular basis, are not realistic for the company. His brand avoidance of *McDonald's* is so strong that it is impractical for *McDonald's* to cater to his individual request.

With a lot of fast food places, there's not a whole lot that would make me change my mind, really at all... So they've done a lot of things, the whole health damage control thing with McDonald's, it still hasn't worked. Sure they sell salads, I guess that's one thing that's a positive, but you're still having children that are being influenced by a Happy Meal.

MT Int 16 (Male, 42)

MT admits that *McDonald's* has attempted to change various aspects of its practice to have a more positive impact. However, he interprets those measures as mere 'damage control' tactics and quickly points out that children are still being negatively influenced by junk food. Thus, MT does not believe that there is much *McDonald's* could do to change his existing brand avoidance attitudes. Similar to DS, his brand avoidance attitude is also 'incurable'.

Even though a large number of people share the opinions of MT and DS, it should be kept in mind that *McDonald's* is still a profitable brand. Therefore, until the number of avoiders outnumbers their target market, *McDonald's* does not actually need to cater for people like DS and MT. However, it would still be prudent for companies, particularly controversial ones like *McDonald's*, to monitor the opinion of brand avoiders such as MT and DS, if only to be aware of the anti-consumption attitudes directed at their brand.

4.1.6 Summary of avoidance antidotes

Several avoidance antidotes emerged from the qualitative data, which may be useful in restricting or alleviating brand avoidance. These antidotes were organised in relation to the degree of control the firm has over the strategy and the likelihood of success. Based on the remarks of the current group of participants, it appears that the strategies in which the organisation relinquished some control of the brand may actually be the more effective avoidance antidotes. This is an interesting finding, with equally interesting implications. Since brand avoidance is due to the negative re-construction of brand promises, perhaps the most effective avoidance antidotes are those that encourage consumers to positively re-construct brand meaning, as opposed to the strategies where the firm attempts to control the recovery of the brand. Furthermore, this notion may be especially true for hegemonic brands that are perceived, by some participants, to be over-controlling in the first place. In other words, while changes implemented by the parent company may face consumer cynicism, strategies that give consumers some power over their interpretation of brands may actually result in more compelling changes in brand avoidance attitudes and behaviour. Of course, this proposition should not be generalised beyond the context of this study.

Overall, four main themes emerged that might be useful in restricting or alleviating brand avoidance. The first strategy requires a transformation of the negative brand promise, by way of a 'genuine adaptation' in the brand and the company, but in spite of these efforts consumers may still remain cynical. The second strategy involves the

diversification of brand promises. Basically, consumer's attitudes and behaviours towards the avoided brand may not apply to the firm's sub-brands. Thus, by sub-branding, firms are able to create perceptual distance between the negative promises of an avoided brand and the promises of its other brands. Enhancing the negative brand promise is the third and most commonly mentioned strategy for alleviating brand avoidance and consists of four sub themes: 'value augmentation', 'image adaptation', 'network formation' and 'positive WOM'. The fourth strategy involves restoring undelivered brand promises, and 'sampling solution' is one salient method of achieving this goal. However, whether the sample is evaluated as positive or not, depends entirely on the consumer's interpretation of the consumption experience. Lastly, the data reveals instances of brand avoidance that are simply too intense to remedy. In these cases the negative brand promises remain 'irreconcilable', despite the various strategies that a firm could implement to 'cure' brand avoidance. Thus, some cases of brand avoidance may be considered 'incurable'.

A criticism of the avoidance antidote section might be that the concepts covered are the same as the strategies used to convince consumers to purchase a brand. Indeed, many of the categories discussed are used frequently by companies to sell their products and services. However, it should be noted that this study's conceptualisation of avoidance antidotes emerged from interviews pertaining to brand avoidance. Hence these strategies are not only able to persuade neutral consumers to select a brand, but they may also enable companies to reverse consumer behaviour and attitudes that are initially negative; a task that this thesis argues is more challenging.

Finally, caution needs to be used when considering any of the 'avoidance antidotes' as practical remedies. Throughout this section, and this thesis in general, emphasis has been placed on the theoretical implications of the various concepts. The various avoidance antidotes are only able to alleviate brand avoidance in the participants of this research, and by doing so, contribute to the theoretical understanding of brand avoidance. In other words, a participant who has had a positive consumption experience as a result of a free sample should 'theoretically' stop his or her brand avoidance towards a target brand. However, this outcome does not imply that a company should provide free samples to everyone who is not currently purchasing its brand. Owing to the socially constructed nature of this research, findings cannot be generalised to a population beyond the context of this thesis, but may be used to inform theory.

4.2 Summary of Chapter Four: Managing Brand Avoidance

The second objective of this thesis was to explore the circumstance in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated. By exploring these concepts, this thesis contributes knowledge to managing brand avoidance. Apart from relevant themes that emerged spontaneously throughout the in-depth interview, the researcher also used two specific research questions to gather data on the conditions where brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated. The first question asked what prevented participants from avoiding the brands that they would like to avoid. The second question asked what conditions would be necessary for the participants to reselect the brands that they were currently avoiding.

A perceived lack of alternatives, inertia and the perceived cost of switching, the influence of other people within the purchase situation, and low involvement with a product category, emerged as the main reasons preventing brand avoidance from occurring. However, the main contribution of this chapter was to develop, from the raw data provided by participants, insights that may be useful in the management of brand avoidance.

Several strategies that might be used to stop brand avoidance arose from those conversations, and were coded as 'avoidance antidotes'. The strategies ranged from those where the company possessed a large amount of control, through to tactics over which the firm had little influence. With regards to the negative promises framework, companies may attempt to transform, diversify, enhance, or restore their negative brand promises. However, in some cases, negative brand promises remain irreconcilable, as some consumers remain suspicious.

In accordance with grounded theory tradition, additional literature was drawn on to inform the constructs above. Overall, the concept of avoidance antidotes, which emerged from negative case analysis of the qualitative data, should contribute towards the understanding of the conditions that may restrict or alleviate brand avoidance. Therefore, this thesis contributes to marketing academia and practice, respectively, by exploring the circumstances in which brand avoidance stops occurring, and by offering insights into the management of brand avoidance.

CHAPTER FIVE:

AN EMERGENT THEORY OF BRAND AVOIDANCE

The three main objectives of this thesis are to:

- 1) Explore the avoidance of brands from a multi-dimensional perspective.
- 2) Consider the circumstances in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated.
- 3) Offer an integrated and comprehensive understanding of brand avoidance.

The first two objectives of this thesis have been fulfilled. Discussion chapters three and four have revealed four types of brand avoidance (experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral) and highlighted the circumstances in which brand avoidance may be restricted or alleviated (avoidance antidotes). The concept of the negative brand promise was also proposed in an attempt to understand the motivations behind the various acts of brand avoidance. This thesis contends that since brands are socially constructed bundles of meanings, they are able to be re-constructed in the minds of consumers to represent negative promises. Consequently, people are motivated to avoid undelivered, symbolically unappealing, value inadequate, and socially detrimental brand promises. Likewise, attempts to manage brand avoidance may also be understood from the perspective of the negative promises framework, as discussed in the preceding chapter.

However, aside from ensuring that emergent categories and constructs are grounded in data, discovering new theoretical relationships/connections between substantive codes are also an important aspect of grounded theory research (Glaser 1992; 1978). Thus, part of the third objective of this thesis is to offer an integrated understanding of brand avoidance. Hence, in this chapter, previously discussed concepts will be combined into an emergent theoretical model of brand avoidance.

Figure 3 displays the way in which the four reasons for avoidance and the factors preventing, restricting, or alleviating brand avoidance, are theoretically related to one another within the consumption system. Solid arrows represent circumstances that are beneficial for the brand (from the firm's perspective); for instance, an improvement in brand equity, the factors preventing brand avoidance, or when brand avoidance has been restricted or alleviated, thereby leading to re-selection of the brand. In contrast, dotted arrows represent pathways that lead to brand avoidance and, thus, are unfavourable for the brand.

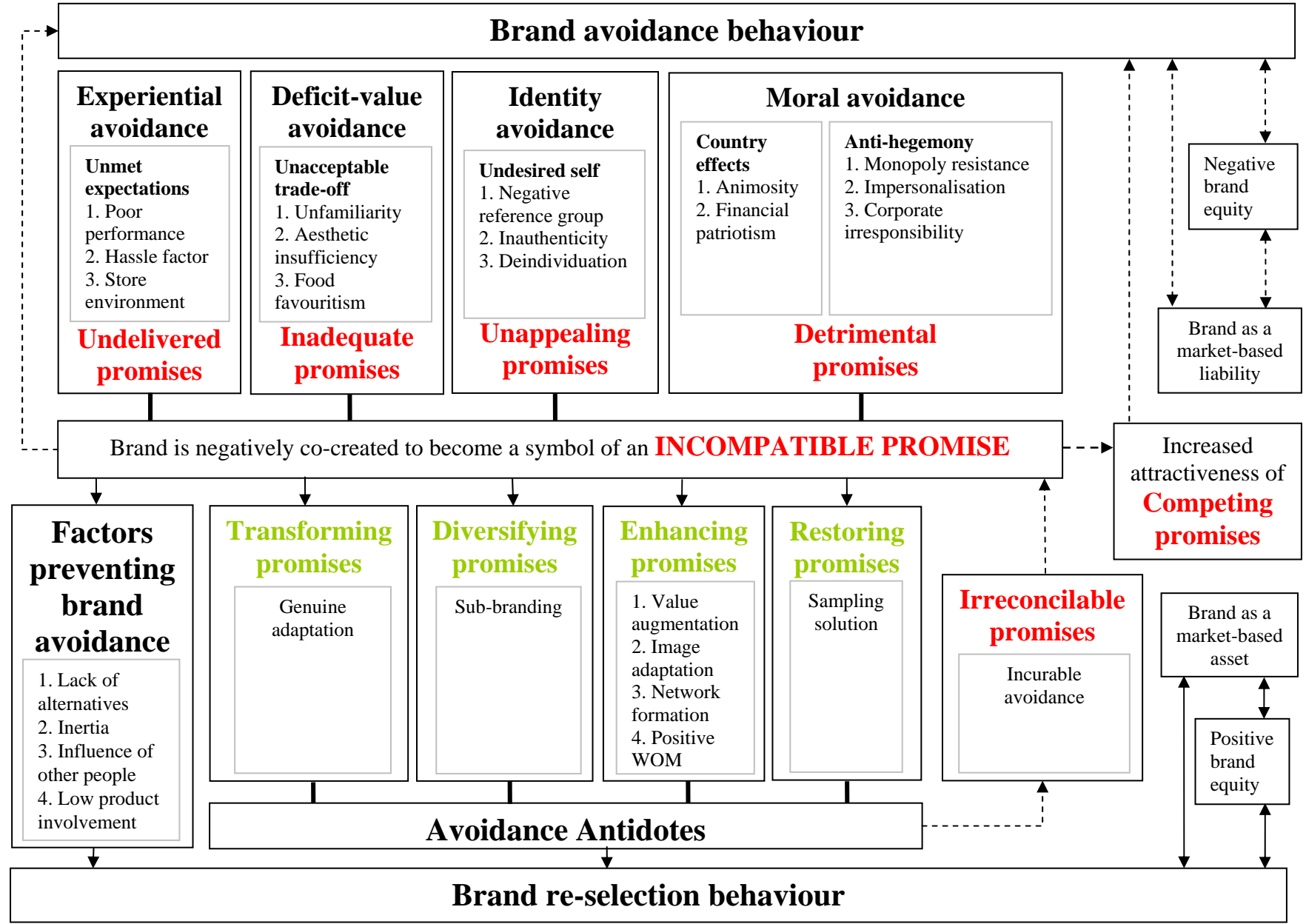
The four main reasons for brand avoidance are positioned on the top of the diagram and are labelled accordingly (experiential, deficit-value, identity, and moral avoidance). As the model indicates, the four negative brand promises that participants are motivated to avoid may be further abstracted into a core category termed an 'incompatible promise'. In other words, undelivered, inadequate, unappealing, and detrimental promises, which motivate the four types of brand avoidance, are all 'incompatible' brand promises. As the dotted arrows indicate, not only do incompatible promises lead to the behavioural avoidance of a target brand, but they may also make the competing promises of other brands appear more attractive, thereby potentially leading to brand avoidance, albeit indirectly.

Throughout interviews, participants spoke about their intentions to avoid certain brands. However, the qualitative data also revealed several factors that prevented some participants from turning their avoidance attitudes into actual behaviours. These preventative factors are illustrated in the lower left corner of figure 3. Although most of those factors were not easily controlled by the company, nonetheless, they may still lead to the re-selection of the target brand, and therefore should be acknowledged.

More importantly, figure 3 suggests that 'incompatible promises' may be 'transformed', 'diversified', 'enhanced', or 'restored' through the use of various strategies. These, 'avoidance antidotes' may help to restrict or alleviate brand avoidance, thereby leading to the re-selection of the target brand. This thesis contends that if a brand is continually re-selected, it qualifies as possessing some form of positive brand equity. Even if consumers' attitudes towards certain brands are negative, the behavioural outcomes of re-selection, as far as the firms are concerned, are still positive. Simply put, re-selected brands generate value for the firm, and thus, may be considered market-based assets. This positive brand cycle is displayed in the lower right hand corner of Figure 3 and is illustrated with the solid arrows leading from brand re-selection, to positive brand equity, to the brand as a market-based asset.

However, the emergent model contends that not all incidents of brand avoidance are curable. Thus, despite the various 'avoidance antidotes' that a company could implement, in an attempt to manage brand avoidance, some incompatible brand promises may simply remain 'irreconcilable'. As indicated by the dotted arrow, an 'irreconcilable promise' means that brand avoidance may persist.

Finally, Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between brand avoidance, brand re-selection, and brand equity. One well-established view of branding is that brand selection (and re-selection) leads to positive brand equity, so brands that are continuously selected are considered to be market-based assets (Srivastava et al. 1998). This traditional perspective is displayed in the bottom right of the model. However, an equally valid contention is that brands may also develop into market-based liabilities. The evidence provided by this research suggests that some participants can develop negative attitudes and behaviours towards brands. Therefore, brand avoidance behaviours may lead to negative brand equity and, as a consequence, such brands could develop into market-based liabilities. This new perspective on brand equity, and original contribution to theory, is displayed on the top right of the diagram.



- - - - - = Paths that lead to brand avoidance and decrease brand equity
 - - - - - = Paths that restrict brand avoidance and improve brand equity
 - - - - - = Indicates that some constructs belong to a higher order category

Figure 3. Emergent theoretical model of brand avoidance

5.1 The Brand as an Incompatible Promise

This thesis employs a 'holistic' definition of brand, whereby brands are considered bundles of meaning, or multi dimensional value systems (Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). In line with this multifaceted perspective, a number of marketing scholars have argued that one important aspect of brand meaning, and marketing in general, is the notion of a brand as a 'promise' or 'covenant' (Balmer and Gray 2003; Berry 2000; Bitner 1995; Brodie et al. 2006; Calonius 2006; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2003; Gronroos 2006; Levitt 1981; Vallaster and De Chernatony 2005; Ward et al. 1999). As the previous chapters have already indicated, this idea of the brand as a promise is also particularly useful for helping to understand brand avoidance.

Strictly speaking, a promise is an assurance or declaration that something will or will not happen and, as a result, promises create a reason to expect something (Gronroos 2006; Merriam-Webster 1998). However, an interesting aspect of promises is that they may be based on real or imaginary resources, and can be either implicit or explicit. Furthermore, like any other form of social communication, promises involve an element of subjective interpretation/evaluation by the parties involved, both before and after a transaction (Calonius 2006; Gronroos 2006). Thus, in the consumer's mind, a brand promise is an assurance that by purchasing a specific brand, certain events should be expected to follow.

Since many consumers cannot fully experience nor assess a product or service in advance, many purchase decisions are essentially based on implicit or explicit promises or 'metaphorical reassurances' (Levitt 1981), and, therefore, promises are a crucial component of marketing. Similarly, when consumers base their purchasing decision on a brand, they are relying on the brand to act as a promise or reassurance of certain outcomes. This thesis has provided evidence that not all brand promises are necessarily interpreted in a positive light. Instead, some brand associations may be re-constructed in the mind of the consumer to represent a promise of a negative outcome; an outcome that is incompatible with the individual's desires.

In this thesis, it has been observed that brand avoidance may arise from incidents where brand promises have been undelivered/broken, or when brand promises have been negatively re-constructed in the mind of the consumer to represent an assurance of something inadequate in value, symbolically unappealing, or socially detrimental. In all cases of brand avoidance, the brand has become representative of an 'incompatible promise'; therefore, the brand, and what it is interpreted to deliver, is incompatible with the consumer's

needs or values. As a consequence of this negative re-construction of brand meaning, the consumer is motivated to avoid the brand. Thus, the notion of an 'incompatible brand promise' is this thesis's 'core construct' of interest and is also the concept that accounts for the majority of brand avoidance behaviours and attitudes.

In terms of the ontology, epistemology, and theoretical perspective of the current research, the relevance of historical realism, social constructionism, symbolic interactionism and the philosophical hermeneutics are now re-emphasised. As mentioned throughout this thesis, brands, and the promises they come to represent, are socially constructed symbols of communication. This perspective means that a brand, and what it communicates to the consumer, is based on the wider norms of the society in which that consumer lives, as well as the level of social hierarchy in which he or she dwells. For instance, although experiential avoidance is indeed experienced by the individual, his or her assessment of the negative experience is only meaningful in relation to other consumers' experiences. In other words, undelivered brand promises are only possible through the violation of expectations, and most consumer expectations are socially constructed within a specific socio-historical context.

Similarly, in cases of deficit-value avoidance, a brand can be re-constructed to represent an inadequate brand promise when a product is perceived to be lacking in value. However, this evaluation of the brand is only possible when the consumer compares the sacrifice to benefit trade-off of one brand to those of other brands within his or her world view. Similarly, identity avoidance is motivated by the unappealing brand promise of symbolic undesirability; however, what is considered 'desirable' or 'undesirable' is predominately constructed within a social context.

Lastly, avoidance of a brand because of ideological incongruities (moral avoidance) is only possible by comparing the brand/organisation to what is considered 'moral' within the individual's socio-historical context. Thus, all incidents of brand avoidance involve the interaction between the consumer, society, and the brand as a symbolic tool, and hence this thesis's compatibility with symbolic interactionism and philosophical hermeneutics.

Also of importance, is the notion that the four reasons for brand avoidance are not mutually exclusive and many of the emergent themes may simultaneously operate within one person. Certainly, one of this thesis's main criticisms of existing research, in the area of anti-consumption, is that the focus has often been one-dimensional. To address the limitations of previous theory, this thesis has attempted to provide a more complex, comprehensive, and integrative understanding of the phenomenon. For instance, the relationship and distinctions between identity and moral avoidance have already been discussed. Similarly, links between

identity and deficit-value avoidance also exist, since an argument could be made that all consumption serves a practical purpose. In other words, even symbolic consumption serves the purpose of self-expression, or identity enhancement. For example, although brands such as *Ferrari* and *Mercedes* are considered symbolic brands, their symbolic status is based on a foundation of functional benefits. If *Ferrari* were perceived as deficient in functional value, unreliable and lacking in quality, its value as a symbolic brand would also decrease. Therefore, utilitarian and symbolic associations are intertwined and the brand's value constellation is built from a combination of associations, none of which are mutually exclusive (Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony 2000; Keller 1993).

Even experiential benefits, traditionally described as the associations of 'feelings' linked to a brand or product when consumed (Keller 1993; Park et al. 1986), could be linked to functional benefits. The reason being that experiential benefits serve a practical purpose to the consumer; that is to say, the customer perceives that they will feel good when they use the brand. Similarly, an individual can also gain a sense of joy (experiential benefit) by purchasing a product associated with high quality and old fashioned durability (functional attributes). Even 'social approval', normally classified as a symbolic benefit (Keller 1993), could be considered a functional benefit, since a brand that enhances a consumer's social status may prevent the very tangible problem of being ostracised.

Some previous research also suggests that symbolic and functional benefits are not mutually exclusive. Bhat et al. (1998), conducted a factor analysis of 20 adjectives describing brand use, for example, 'exciting', 'unique', 'sophisticated'. They concluded that brands could indeed be positioned into functional *and* symbolic groups; thus, unlike opposite ends of a continuum, symbolic and functional dimensions should be viewed as separate factors; in other words, it is possible for a brand to possess aspects of both elements. Consequently, the symbolic associations consumers have of a brand may be related to the functional associations and vice versa. A typical example is the consumer heuristic where high price brands (functional association) are also frequently judged as being of higher prestige (symbolic association) (Bhat and Reddy 1998; Solomon 2002). In short, many brands exhibit varying amounts of symbolic and functional associations simultaneously (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Park et al. 1986). This thesis adopts a similar view of functional and symbolic brand associations, asserting that the traditional division between functional versus symbolic brands may be too simplistic a distinction. Hence, some of the participants in this thesis displayed both functional (deficit-value) and symbolic (identity) avoidance of the same brand. For this reason, the different types of brand avoidance have been further abstracted and collapsed into the core category of an 'incompatible promise'. This core category provides a more parsimonious explanation of the brand avoidance phenomenon and

elevates the explanations provided by this thesis beyond the traditional classification of symbolic versus functional brand meanings. In other words, when a person avoids a brand for functional or symbolic reasons (or both), that person is essentially avoiding a brand because of the 'incompatible promises' that the brand represents.

5.2 Increased Attractiveness of Competing Promises

Most consumer purchase decisions are influenced by both approach and avoidance. So, individuals are 'pushed' away from undesired end states, just as much as they are 'pulled' towards achieving desired end states, and in most cases the two forms of motivation operate simultaneously (Bourdieu 1984; Elliot 1999; Markus and Nurius 1986; Ogilvie 1987; Solomon 2002; Wilk 1997a). Similarly, this thesis contends that when a brand's value constellation is re-constructed to represent an 'incompatible promise', not only may that lead to avoidance of the brand, but the promises of competitors may also become more attractive to the consumer. As a result, the consumer approaches competing brands to satisfy his or her consumption needs and wants. This preference for competing promises leads to the perpetual avoidance of the offending brand, and is displayed in Figure 3 by the dashed arrow leading from 'competing promises' to brand avoidance. The way in which an 'incompatible promise' may motivate consumers to approach competing brands holds an interesting insight for the concept of brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty is a well researched area (Baldinger and Rubinson 1996; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Jacoby and Kyner 1973; Oliver 1999; Roselius 1971) and can be defined as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, *despite* situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver 1999 p. 34). Simply stated, brand loyalty is the consistent purchasing preference a consumer has for one set of brands, over a group of other brands. Although there is debate as to whether brand loyalty should be conceptualised at the attitudinal or behavioural level, or both (Baldinger and Rubinson 1996; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Jacoby and Kyner 1973), this section of the thesis is mainly interested in incidents of affective loyalty, where a brand is selected due to the attitudinal preference rather than habit (Oliver 1999).

As early as the 1970's, brand loyalty was suggested to consist of both acceptance *and* rejection; therefore, "not only does it 'select in' certain brands; it also 'selects out' certain others" (Jacoby and Kyner 1973 p. 2). Similarly, this thesis contends that brand avoidance not only results in the active rejection of certain brands, but at a broader level, it is also a phenomenon that impacts on the attractiveness of competing brands.

Some participants' narratives of brand avoidance were mentioned alongside notions of brand loyalty, which provides an interesting juxtaposition that contributes to the understanding of both brand loyalty and brand avoidance.

For instance, after revealing that social irresponsibility (moral avoidance) was one reason for his avoidance of *Shell*, RH adds that his avoidance of the brand is also driven by his approach towards the more attractive promises of competing brands:

The other reason why I avoid Shell is because the alternative BP gives a lot more mileage, the petrol consumption of my car, in terms of saving or economy, that's probably a bigger if not equally large and important cause. So I get more mileage from my particular engine from BP petrol, than I do from Shell.

RH Int 12 (Male, 26)

Similarly, throughout her interview, SR revealed various experiential and deficit-value reasons for her avoidance of *McDonald's*; however, her avoidance of *McDonald's* does not operate in isolation within the consumer system. Thus, what becomes apparent, from her following quote, is the inextricable link between the incompatible promises of *McDonald's* and the increased attractiveness of competing brands:

I like Wendy's because I like their chicken burgers, and just cause they make them fresh they haven't been sitting their for ages. You know at McDonald's they could have been sitting there for a while. At Wendy's they make them fresh and they have fresh salads in them and stuff. I think the quality at Wendy's is better, probably paying more but I think its better quality and they use real chicken.

SR Int 2 (Female, 45)

SR's avoidance of *McDonald's* is mentioned alongside her loyalty for *Wendy's*. An interesting question then, is whether she is loyal to *Wendy's* because she feels compelled to avoid *McDonald's*, or does she avoid *McDonald's* because she is loyal to *Wendy's*? In other words, does SR's 'hatred' of *McDonald's* push her towards the competing promises of *Wendy's*, or is it her 'love' of *Wendy's* that pulls her away from the offending brand? Of course, the most sensible answer is probably both, since approach and avoidance are able to operate concurrently within each person (Elliot 1999). Hence, SR avoids *McDonald's* because its brand promises are incompatible, and she simultaneously approaches *Wendy's* because its competing promises are more attractive when compared to the alternative. In this sense, brand avoidance may be partly responsible for some cases of brand loyalty.

5.3 Negative Brand Equity

Another interesting proposition that has emerged from this thesis on brand avoidance, relates to the resource-based view of the firm (Barney 1991; Barney, Wright, and Ketchen Jr.

2001; Hooley, Broderick, and Moller 1998; Hooley, Greenley, Cadogan, and Fahy 2003; Srivastava et al. 2001; Srivastava et al. 1998), and is illustrated by the dotted arrows on the top right corner of Figure 3 (page 211). Based on the qualitative data gathered and interpreted by this researcher, this thesis introduces the innovative notion of the brand as a market-based liability.

Brand equity was originally defined as a set of assets or liabilities linked to the brand's name that adds value to, or subtracts from, the firm or its customers. Thus, positive brand equity is the added value that the brand provides to the company through the extra money a consumer is willing to pay for the branded service or product, as a result of brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations (Aaker 1996). Similarly, Keller (1993) states that a brand has customer-based equity when consumers act more or less favourably to the brand than to an identical product or service that is un-named or fictitiously named. Although those landmark definitions contain terms like: 'subtract', 'liabilities', and 'less favourably', the concept of brand equity as a balance of both negative and positive components has still been relatively ignored in most branding research, with most studies focussing only on the positive components of brand equity.

With regards to the resource-based view of the firm, Srivastava, Fahey, and Christensen (2001) have elucidated the multitude of ways in which a brand, as a relational market-based asset, with its associated positive brand equity, is able to enhance shareholder value. Although there is little dispute that a well-managed brand is a market-based asset, there has been scarce discussion over the idea of the brand as a market-based liability. Thus, there still exists a gap in this area, despite the recommended importance of exploring the reasons why a market-based asset might "depreciate, decay, or decline" (Srivastava et al. 2001).

In the current discussion, the broader definition of liability is used, whereby a liability is defined as anything that could be considered a disadvantage or handicap for an entity (Merriam-Webster 1998). Thus, a market-based liability is anything that is considered a disadvantage for a company. The definition is also in line with Barney's conceptualisation of a firm's resources, where an asset is described as one of a number of resources that "improve a firm's efficiency and effectiveness" (Barney 1991p. 101). Thus, in this thesis, a liability could be considered the opposite of an asset; in other words, anything that decreases a firm's efficiency and effectiveness in the marketplace.

It is plausible that most, if not all, brands were conceived by their respective firms to develop into market-based assets. However, this research has demonstrated that, within the marketing and consumption system, certain incidents may result in a brand promise

becoming negatively re-constructed, thereby leading to brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours. This thesis further contends that a brand which is avoided by many consumers has the potential to become a market-based liability.

To illustrate, a brand that suffers from sustained periods of brand avoidance or failing consumer relationships may develop negative brand equity, since customers consistently react unfavourably to the brand (Aaker 1996; Keller 1993). This negative brand equity is also likely to worsen if there are no avoidance factors preventing brand avoidance from occurring or if avoidance antidotes have not been implemented to transform, diversify, enhance, or restore the negative brand promises. The brand could then develop negative network equity, as the perceptions and behaviours of additional distributors and retailers, in short 'the market place', co-mingle to form an even less favourable impression of the brand. The avoided brand then creates 'de-valuation' for the firm and its shareholders, resulting in negative financial equity; in other words, the brand promise actually results in a reduction of the return on investment. As these negative scenarios accumulate, the brand might be considered a market-based liability, since it is a disadvantage for the company. That is, the brand impedes rather than enhances the firm's value creating properties, reduces cash flow in certain domains, or, at the very least, limits the company's full potential for producing value.

This thesis suggests that there is a state of flux between the positive brand building efforts of the firm and the negative brand associations that exist within any market, and that both aspects contribute to the co-constructed meaning of a brand. If the negative meanings that are associated with a brand grow in number and influence, and enough consumers from the target market begin to avoid the brand, then negative brand equity could become a reality and the brand could become a market-based liability.

5.4 Insights into Branding

This section provides some insights into branding, as discovered during the course of this thesis; it also contributes some original and counterintuitive thinking pertaining to brand management.

At the most basic level, brands are bundles of meaning used to identify and differentiate the goods of one company from those of another (AMA 2006). Since it is human nature to form heuristics and to mentally categorise information, it is inevitable that all products, organisations, and services have become branded. To take this argument further, if products and services were not branded by the producer, they would be branded by the consumers themselves, in either a positive or negative manner. For example, if an unbranded product

results in a negative consumption experience, then any products originating from that manufacturer may be avoided. In this sense, the product made by that manufacturer has been given additional (negative) meaning, has been identified as being different from other manufacturers, and has become 'branded' in the mind of consumers. Furthermore, according to the findings developed in this thesis, that 'brand' now represents a negative promise, one that reduces the commercial worth of the product. Of course, the preceding example could easily apply to a positive consumption experience. In any case, because branding is, fundamentally, a psychological process that exists within the minds of consumers, the 'branding' process is actually inevitable. Therefore, one insight is that the development of brand meaning will occur with both positive and negative information, with or without the company's involvement.

A second insight into branding revolves around the multifaceted nature of brands (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998). As Figure 3 displays, although the core concept of an incompatible promise is the main motivation underlying brand avoidance, there were actually many different reasons for avoiding brands, as the data revealed. In fact, during the course of this research, it was discovered that, in some cases, the same brand was avoided for a number of different reasons. If products and services remained unbranded, people could only avoid them because of a negative consumption experience (experiential avoidance). However, in modern day marketing, brands are multi-dimensional, not only do they represent a place of origin, but, these days, brands can stand for a plethora of intangible associations, such as a stereotypical user group, aspirational meanings, a code of conduct or standard of practice by the organisation, a promise of quality or a particular consumption experience, and in some cases, a way of life. Ironically, as this research has discovered, a brand that possesses much meaning is actually more vulnerable than a brand that possess fewer meanings, since any one of its numerous brand associations may be criticised and develop into another reason for brand avoidance. Therefore as a company attempts to improve its brand image in one area it dilutes or leaves itself open to denigration in another area. As this thesis demonstrates, some participants avoid *McDonald's* for fear of unhygienic food practices, and yet when a clean environment is provided, other consumers (sometimes even the same consumer) accuse the brand of being 'sterile' and lacking atmosphere. Participants also blame *McDonald's* for causing obesity and degrading forests; hence, several logical solutions for the *McDonald's* brand was to sponsor a rain forest exhibit and fund a hotel that houses the family of hospitalised children. However, once again, these attempts at associating the brand with corporate responsibility are met by consumer cynicism. Thus, the second insight into branding discovered in this thesis is that, in some cases, multifaceted brands may actually have more weaknesses than strengths.

A third insight, is that the larger an organisation and more successful its brands become, the more likely it will be affected by brand avoidance. Holt (2002) alludes to a similar notion in his seminal article when he points out the paradox that consumer resistance is often targeted at successful brands. Similarly, the main theme of anti-hegemony accounted for a large segment of the qualitative data gathered from the participants of this thesis. Although counterintuitive, the contention that larger and more dominant brands are more likely to become targets of brand avoidance is also logical. Given that a profitable brand may have been consumed/used by a larger pool of people, this means that, probabilistically, more successful brands have had the 'opportunity' to dissatisfy more people than a smaller brand.

Additionally, since a more popular brand has been exposed to more people, this means it is likely to undergo more co-creation and, as a consequence, may possess more brand associations. Thus, ironically, popular brands actually have more areas in which consumers may find fault. A successful brand is also more likely to come under media scrutiny, arouse cynicism, and be perceived as domineering, mainstream, and inauthentic. Compounding these problems is the premise that people also expect more from brands that are flourishing, which establishes a scenario more likely to result in undelivered promises than in the case of less successful brands.

Moreover, large companies that are responsible for the majority of highly successful brands are made up of many employees and levels of hierarchy. This complex organisational structure means that internal branding, which is a necessary component in maintaining the quality and consistency of a brand promise (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn 2003), is more difficult to manage in larger brands, simply because there are a higher number of individuals in large organisations. More employees and multiple points of contact between a large brand and the consumer, leads to a higher likelihood of discrepancies between what the consumer has been promised by the company and what the actual consumption experience is, as delivered by any one of its many employees. Thus, the third insight into branding is that participants are more likely to re-construct larger brands as incompatible brand promises and, as a consequence, are also more likely to avoid larger brands.

Not only are dominant brands more prone to brand avoidance, but a fourth insight into branding is that the companies of successful brands may also find it more difficult to manage brand avoidance, and other negative consumption experiences in general. A successful brand that caters for many consumers and is managed by a large organisation may find itself more cumbersome to react to idiosyncratic problems and complaints. Although large organisations are designed to be efficient at performing standard tasks on a large scale, their bureaucratic structure means that large organisations may struggle with situations that are

slightly out of the ordinary. For instance, a consumer may resolve an uncommon or unusual complaint in a small café by simply speaking directly to the owner. Similar complaints in larger organisations are required to go through the 'proper channels'; thus, a disgruntled consumer can not simply demand to speak to the Chief executive of *Starbucks*. In all likelihood *Starbucks* the company, may not really care about the unique complaint of a single consumer, once the usual customer complaints protocol have been exhausted. The employees of large companies may also be powerless to resolve the idiosyncratic problems that lay outside the usual complaints for which the company has established a set of procedures. Finally, even if *Starbucks* does acknowledge an unusual problem as being valid and really does want to resolve the issue, when compared to the smaller more agile businesses, the large multi-national company may be slower (and may find it more difficult) to correct the problem, adapt its protocols, and alter its brand promises.

Overall, this thesis suggests that the more successful a brand becomes the more weaknesses it inherits, and while brands belonging to small and medium businesses sometimes struggle due to a lack of exposure and consumer co-creation. The opposite dilemma may affect some large organisations and their global brands. By being exposed to too many consumers and because of too much interaction, large brands, though more profitable, may also be more prone to brand dilution, negative re-construction of brand meaning, criticism, cynicism, and, eventually, avoidance.

5.5 Summary of Chapter Five: The Emergent Theory of Brand Avoidance

Chapter five contributes to the study of brand avoidance by offering a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon. The four main reasons for brand avoidance, the factors preventing brand avoidance, and the avoidance antidotes that restrict or alleviate brand avoidance, were combined in an emergent theoretical model. This model not only provides an integrative synopsis of the phenomenon, but also takes into account the role of brand avoidance within the context of a wider consumption system.

As Figure 3 summarises, an individual may develop 'experiential avoidance' of a brand from a first hand negative consumption experience where brand promises have been undelivered. Alternatively, various sources of information within society might convey the brand promise as being value inadequate or symbolically unappealing, in terms of the individual's preferences. Additionally, a consumer might perceive the brand promise as being detrimental to society and oppressive, and therefore may disagree with the policies that are used to govern the brand (moral avoidance). The core construct of an 'incompatible promise'

was then conceptualised in an attempt to unite the understanding of brand avoidance, as generated from this research. This thesis also contends that as brand promises become incompatible, the competing promises of other brands become more attractive, potentially resulting in continual avoidance of the target brand, and indirect loyalty to the competing brands.

Nevertheless, for behavioural avoidance to occur, the individual must overcome certain factors preventing brand avoidance. Furthermore, even when a consumer is successfully avoiding a brand, several strategies may stop brand avoidance (avoidance antidotes) by transforming, diversifying, enhancing, or restoring the negative brand promises. However, not all brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours are 'curable'. Thus, depending on the consumer's conviction some negative brand promises may be 'irreconcilable' and, consequently, brand avoidance may persist. If a brand is avoided by large numbers of people for prolonged periods of time, it may develop negative brand equity, and may be considered a market-based liability. This downward spiral of effects is especially likely, if the brand avoiders constitute the brand's target market.

Several counterintuitive insights into branding and brand avoidance are commented on in this chapter. The first idea proposed is that the development of brand meaning will occur with or without the company's involvement. The second idea suggests that multifaceted brands may actually have more weaknesses than strengths. The brief section also suggests that successful brands are more likely to be affected by brand avoidance, and that large brands may find some aspects of brand avoidance harder to manage than its smaller competitors.

Although the use of the negative promises framework to understand brand avoidance is an original contribution to marketing, there are actually multiple ways of interpreting any qualitative data. Therefore, other theories of consumption could have also been used to code the qualitative data gathered in this thesis. For instance, many of the reasons for brand avoidance could be categorised within Sheth et al's (1991) theory of consumption values (functional, social, experiential, conditional, and epistemic value). Similarly, Keller's (1993) conceptualisation of customer-based brand equity may have also been used as a framework for organising some of the themes that emerged from this data. However, in line with grounded theory, the four main types of negative promises motivating brand avoidance, and the two main types of avoidance boundaries, were derived directly from this researcher's interpretation of the present data and informed by existing literature, rather than being 'forced' into fitting with preconceived ideas (Dey 1999; Glaser 1992; Glaser 1978; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Finally, it has been argued that the true contribution of grounded theory is not the discovery of new ideas, but rather the way in which additional meaning may be given to existing concepts through the discovery of new relationships between them (Glaser 1992). Thus, in addition to creating a negative promises perspective with which to shed light on the phenomenon of brand avoidance, this thesis also integrates its main findings into a theoretical model of brand avoidance. This original model may contribute additional understanding of how the various brand avoidance constructs relate to one another within a consumption system. The innovative proposal that brand loyalty may be a factor of brand avoidance and that brand avoidance leads to negative brand equity, which in turn causes the brand to become a market-based liability, was also incorporated into the emergent model. Those propositions and other areas for future research are discussed further, in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUDING REMARKS

This final chapter states the main contributions of this thesis, discusses the various implications of the research findings, addresses the limitations, sets forth recommendations for future research, and concludes the thesis.

6.1 Contributions

In the introduction, the practical problems facing brand managers and the academic gaps in existing brand avoidance research were identified. With regards to practice, the variety of problems that brands may encounter in the modern market suggests that dealing with brand avoidance may involve more than the simple re-evaluation of marketing communications or a narrow focus on the uni-dimensional problems impacting upon a brand. Instead, it may require an analysis of the various points of contact that consumers have with the brand, such as their evaluation of product quality, service interaction with the representatives of the organisation, perceptions of brand image, experiences of store environment, and viewpoints regarding the business practices of the company. In other words, it is likely that there are many different reasons for a consumer's avoidance of certain brands. Awareness of these reasons may be a powerful tool in the maintenance or improvement of a brand/organisation, and sensitivity to the variety of anti-consumption attitudes and behaviours is essential to modern day marketing scholars and practitioners.

Existing research had not provided a suitable definition of brand avoidance. Nor had it considered that since brands are multi-dimensional in nature, so too should be the reasons for brand avoidance. Finally, no studies had specifically explored the conditions and circumstances in which brand avoidance may be restricted or alleviated.

This thesis aims to increase knowledge of anti-consumption in general, and to address the gaps in existing literature with a specific set of objectives:

- 1) Explore the avoidance of brands from a multi-dimensional perspective.
- 2) Consider the circumstances in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated.
- 3) Offer a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of the topic.

To date, no study within the specific realm of brand avoidance has attempted a similar set of goals. In order to fulfil these objectives, a set of research questions was devised to drive the research:

- 1) What brands are avoided by the consumer?
- 2) Why do people to avoid brands?
- 3) What prevents or stops brand avoidance?

It was decided that qualitative data was most appropriate for answering the research questions and for developing theory so that an original contribution could be made to the area of brand avoidance. Thus, in-depth interviews were conducted with a group of participants who were familiar with consumption and brands, and who were able to provide a rich source of information from which themes could emerge.

This thesis makes a number of contributions to the area of brand avoidance by addressing some of the gaps in existing research. Specifically, this thesis:

- 1) Establishes a more suitable definition of brand avoidance. This thesis defines brand avoidance as the conscious, deliberate, and active rejection of a brand that the consumer can afford, owing to the negative meaning associated with that brand.
- 2) Provides evidence of the brand avoidance phenomena.
- 3) Develops a comprehensive conceptual framework with which to classify brand avoidance incidents (experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral avoidance).
- 4) Acknowledges the factors that prevent brand avoidance from occurring.
- 5) Explores in depth the circumstances in which brand avoidance would be restricted or alleviated (avoidance antidotes), thereby providing knowledge relevant to managing brand avoidance.
- 6) Increases the understanding of brand avoidance by utilising existing literature and the innovative negative promises framework.
- 7) Constructs an emergent theoretical model that offers an integrative overview of brand avoidance within the consumption system.
- 8) Introduces the notion of the brand as a market-based liability.

Overall, the three main contributions of this thesis are the comprehensive conceptual framework to classify brand avoidance incidents, the discovery of strategies that could be used for managing brand avoidance (bearing in mind the context in which this knowledge

was discovered), and the emergent theoretical model that provides an integrative overview of the phenomenon.

First, a comprehensive conceptual framework was developed by integrating existing literature with the themes discovered in this grounded theory research (Table 13, page 78). Therefore this thesis provides, for the first time, a meta-analytic understanding of the brand avoidance phenomenon. Not only does this thesis corroborate and combine the findings of previous research, it also reveals the key motivations for brand avoidance by employing the original notion of negative brand promises. Overall, the four main reasons for brand avoidance that comprise the framework (experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral avoidance) provide a multi-dimensional appreciation of brand avoidance.

Second, although many reasons for brand avoidance emerged from the qualitative data, various contradictions and restrictions were also discovered. Negative case analyses of the qualitative data offered fresh insights into the circumstances that either restrict or alleviate brand avoidance (Table 15, page 175). In particular, the category of avoidance antidotes offers insights into the management of brand avoidance. Thus, not only does this research provide empirical evidence of brand avoidance, it also illustrates that brand avoidance is a complex phenomena.

Third, this research makes an innovative theoretical contribution by presenting an emergent theoretical model that elucidates the relationships between the various brand avoidance constructs (Figure 3, page 211). Not only does the emergent model provide a comprehensive conceptualisation of the brand avoidance process, it also integrates brand avoidance within the greater consumption cycle, taking into account the pertinent concept of brand equity. Furthermore, the notion of the brand as a 'market-based liability' is an original contribution that broadens the perspective of brand management.

In terms of other contributions, previous literature asserts that companies that pay attention to consumers' dissatisfying experiences tend to be evaluated more positively than those that do not provide a channel for consumer complaints (Richins 1983). It has also been argued that 'voicing' behaviour might provide an effective form of feedback to the organisation (Aron 2001; Huefner and Hunt 2000). This study of brand avoidance has been an exercise in listening to consumers voice their complaints about brands. Even though many of the participants may not be part of the avoided brands' target markets, the process of listening to people's negative re-constructions and dissatisfying experiences with brands offers an opportunity to learn about specific problems that may affect the various firms.

In a recent study on brand avoidance, it was suggested that the “critical issue is not how many people embrace these unflattering brand meanings or if they pose an immediate threat to the brand. Indeed a best-case scenario would be to catch these meanings during their underground phase... before [the brand] goes stale and precipitates a full blown branding crises” (Thompson et al. 2006 p.61-62). In other words, the ability to understand and possibly change brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours in consumers should be considered an important long-term goal of any organisation, even if the number of complaining consumers is relatively small. Thus, in line with Thompson and colleagues’ (2006) suggestion, this thesis makes an empirical/practical contribution to marketing through the accumulation and analysis of brand avoidance incidents involving real consumers.

By explicitly exploring ‘why consumers avoid brands’, this thesis makes a practical contribution to the under-researched areas of brand avoidance and anti-consumption. However, another significant contribution of this thesis is that it offers a new perspective with which to understand brand management. Traditionally, marketing managers have concentrated on strategies that aim to persuade customers to select their brands, but as this thesis demonstrates, some consumers actively avoid certain brands. A general lack of research and knowledge relating to this area means that “conventional brand management literature offers little concrete advice on how brand strategists can proactively diagnose the cultural vulnerabilities that could eventually erode their customer-based equity” (Thompson et al. 2006 p. 61). Therefore, this thesis has not only addressed a specific and current issue in brand management, but it has also increased understanding in the general areas of consumer behaviour, consumer resistance, and consumer culture.

6.2 Implications

Certainly, from an academic perspective, knowledge of why people avoid brands is interesting and relevant to the greater understanding of consumer culture. Additionally, from a practical perspective, being aware that brand avoidance is real should, at a minimum, oblige practitioners to acknowledge the state of flux which may exist between positive and negative brand equity. However, it is important that this study of brand avoidance is put into perspective. This thesis, and the research strategy adopted for it, focuses on theory development rather than generalisation. Thus, the majority of implications presented in this thesis should be interpreted at the theoretical level.

In terms of practical implications, even if many consumers hold brand avoidance attitudes, the number of consumers who are passionate enough to carry those attitudes through to consistent behaviour are often fewer in quantity than those who select that brand. Thus, when compared to the number of satisfied target consumers, in most cases, there are not

enough brand avoiders to have a significant affect on immediate sales (Reich 1998). In other words, not all brand managers need to be concerned about a few consumers avoiding their brand, since the financial impact of brand avoidance may be negligible if the majority of the target market still selects the brand. Paradoxically, brands may possess negative brand equity for one segment of the population while simultaneously retaining positive brand equity for another. Though an intriguing concept, this in itself should come as no surprise since brands, and their promises, are seldom created to satisfy entire populations (Gardner and Levy 1955; Ward et al. 1999).

Similarly, other literature posits that a well known brand may still predict superior market performance irrespective of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Hooley et al. 2003). In other words, many brands continue to create value for their shareholders despite the brand avoidance behaviours and attitudes of some consumers. One rationalisation could be provided by the factors that prevent brand avoidance, where various obstacles prevent consumers from exhibiting their avoidance behaviours. For instance, the individual may simply be too lazy to switch brands (inertia) or may perceive a lack of alternatives. In large organisations, existing market share, solid business relationships, and dominant distribution channels buffer the firm from the immediate effects of end-consumer behaviour. In such instances, it could take years for the initial effects of brand avoidance to trickle through to a financially noticeable level.

Nonetheless, this researcher contends that the market place is, ultimately, co-created between the consumer and the market. Therefore, regardless of the firm's protective factors, if enough consumers avoid a brand and no changes are made, the brand could, in theory, develop negative brand equity. As the market place responds negatively to the brand over a period of time, instead of being a market-based asset which creates value for both the consumer and the firm, the brand may become a market-based liability, subtracting value from the firm. Thus, any knowledge and comprehension of why a brand may be faltering is potentially relevant to the brand manager. The four main types of brand avoidance provide the practitioner with theoretical understanding of why consumers may be avoiding his/her brand or, perhaps, a competitor's brand, while the section discussing 'avoidance antidotes' offers some theoretical strategies for managing brand avoidance.

Marketing implications also exist in terms of the factors preventing brand avoidance (lack of alternatives, inertia, product involvement, and influence of other people). While knowledge of these factors is obviously useful for an incumbent brand, this information is just as pertinent to a competitor. For instance, if a competitor knows that a lack of alternatives and inertia are major barriers to consumer switching behaviour, that competitor could first advertise itself as

a suitable alternative, and second, make the costs of switching (time, effort, money) appear less daunting to the potential consumer. Thus, not only can brand avoidance be made more difficult for the company's current customers, but by anticipating the factors that prevent brand avoidance, firms can also implement strategies that make it easier for disgruntled external customers to avoid the competition. In fact, any understanding of why consumers may be avoiding a competitor's brand could be capitalised upon by the firm possessing such knowledge.

The question brand managers must ask is whether it is necessary, cost effective, or even possible, to alter certain aspects of their brand in order to reduce negative brand equity, without disrupting the positive equity that exists with the brand's established base of target customers. Perhaps some aspects of brand avoidance should be prevented due to the potential damage that may develop, while others may be inconsequential. Alternatively, if a brand is judged to be a large enough liability due to an abundance of brand avoidance issues, maybe it should be discontinued to cut losses before further de-valuation occurs for the firm. Another approach might be to implement some exit barriers, making it more difficult for disgruntled consumers to leave. This tactic may work because the emergent theoretical model suggests that consumers must pass through certain 'preventative factors' before they are able to carry out their avoidance behaviour. However, the ethics of such practices need to be considered.

Whatever the case may be, for any remedy of brand avoidance to be effective, the marketing manager needs to consider the basis from which those attitudes and behaviours have stemmed. For instance, although the notion of an 'incompatible promise' underlies most brand avoidance incidents, the reasons for experiential avoidance may be quite different from those causing identity, deficit-value, or moral avoidance. Similarly, some antidotes may be implemented easily, while others may be neither practical nor effective. Thus, the usefulness of the knowledge gained by this thesis still depends on the specific context of each brand.

Nevertheless, it is the researcher's intention that the conceptual framework and emergent theoretical model developed in this thesis will help academics and consumers to understand the phenomenon of brand avoidance. A further aspiration is that the knowledge provided by this study will be considered by practitioners who wish to better manage their brands as market-based assets.

In terms of educational implications, this research has provided evidence that some consumers do avoid brands and has argued that anti-consumption is a relevant topic. As academic interest in anti-consumption increases, this researcher hopes that brand

avoidance will at least be mentioned by marketing educators, in order to provide a more balanced perspective of brand consumption to students.

Lastly, the implications that this thesis has for policy are also worth mentioning. Thus far, much of the discussion in this thesis has been directed at understanding why people avoid brands and strategies for restricting or alleviating this situation. However, social marketing often attempts to discourage unhealthy consumption behaviour, such as drinking and driving, junk foods, and drugs. In other words, social marketers actually wish to encourage anti-consumption, or 'de-market' (Cullwick 1975; Kotler and Levy 1971) certain consumption activities. This thesis outlines the conditions in which anti-consumption occurs, and the circumstances in which avoidance is difficult to carry out anti-consumption, despite the individual's desire to avoid certain brands. Therefore, this research may be quite useful for public policy. Although specific research needs to explore the avenues for the application of this study's findings, there may be the potential for social marketers to use brand avoidance concepts to encourage positive anti-consumption.

6.3 Limitations

All research has its limitations; thus, this subsection will address some of the limitations of this thesis. One clear limitation is that the findings of this research have been developed from a relatively small number of interviews. In other words, the demographic make-up of the sample limits the generalisability of this thesis's findings. Although the sample was more heterogeneous than a solely student sample, and more 'mainstream' than some previous studies of consumer resistance, the majority of participants were people who had some connection to The University of Auckland, either in terms of physical location, or in the form of personal or professional affiliation. As a result, the overall sample consisted of well-educated middle to upper class individuals. Furthermore, although major brands such as *McDonald's*, *Starbucks*, and *Coke* have a broad target market, some of the participants interviewed in this thesis would not have belonged to the target markets of those avoided brands. Therefore, the wider implications of this study must obviously be considered with caution. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998 p. 267), emphasis that the "explanatory power" of a substantive grounded theory, one that has been generated through a specific sample and area of investigation, should never be used to generalise to the greater population. Instead, its "real merit" is in the emergent theory's ability to shed light on the participants' behaviour.

In this thesis, the reasons for brand avoidance, and the circumstances in which brand avoidance was restricted or alleviated, emerged from a relatively small group of informants; thus, the findings should only be interpreted as being representative of the participants'

attitudes and behaviours. For instance, although several participants expressed an avoidance of *The Warehouse* and *McDonald's*, these are highly successful brands that are clearly satisfying their target market. Therefore, any implications that have emerged from the participants of this study must be interpreted within the context of this research.

In other words, the contribution of this thesis is not a generalisable market analysis of consumers' attitudes towards *McDonald's* or any other specific brand, but rather, a theoretical contribution towards the understanding of why some brands may be avoided. For example, the findings of this thesis suggest that a person who associates a clothing brand with a negative reference group (identity avoidance) may 'theoretically' avoid products of that brand because of the 'unappealing promises' that the brand symbolises to him or her. Hence, the reasons for brand avoidance that emerged from this thesis appear to be plausible 'theoretical' explanations as to why some people may avoid certain brands. However, they may not be externally valid reasons in the 'real' world nor may they be the only definitive reasons. For instance, the brand may not be targeted at that individual, and therefore his or her avoidance of the brand, though interesting, may not be of managerial concern. Or there could be another equally valid reason that helps to explain why consumers may be motivated to avoid the brand. Thus, at a practical level, the understanding of brand avoidance offered by this thesis can certainly be used to provide a new perspective on brand management and may also be used to shed light on similar situations (if applicable). However, the findings should not be generalised to all consumers.

At a methodological level, in-depth interviews were deemed the most appropriate research tool in this study. However, one limitation may be the general discrepancy between what people say and what they do; in other words, the gap between behaviour and rhetoric (Taylor and Bogdan 1998) or between attitudes and behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein 1969; Fishbein and Ajzen 1972; Smith and Swinyard 1983).

Additionally, the context in which the interviews were conducted differs from the context in which brand avoidance behaviour would normally occur; that is, the interviewing room versus the market place. Therefore, one criticism of this thesis could be that the difference in environment, whilst discussing brand avoidance attitudes and behaviour, may detract from the full richness of the participants' experiences. Following from this limitation, it could be contended that an observational study may have provided different insights for studying brand avoidance.

In observational studies, the prominence of the consumption situation may increase; as a result, the participant might reduce his or her reliance on recall. Furthermore, since the actual behaviour is often observed first-hand (Taylor and Bogdan 1998), participant

observation could be argued to be a more 'objective' and less intrusive method of exploring brand avoidance than relying on verbal recollections of past experiences. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) states "no other method can provide more depth of understanding than directly observing people... at the scene" (pg. 90).

In spite of the advantages of observational study, the method has disadvantages that make the use of in-depth interviews more suitable for this thesis. First, while the observation of brand selection may be easy, via scanner data or direct observation, a similar approach to brand avoidance is more difficult. With regards to brand avoidance, there may be little physical interaction between the brand and the consumer, and an obvious non-existence of scanner data for the brands a consumer does not purchase. Perhaps, if consumers are asked to bear in mind why they are avoiding certain brands during their consumption activities, the results could prove interesting. However, such an approach would suffer from similar problems as interviews, in that the saliency of brand avoidance would be artificially raised, which may then alter the actual behaviour of the participants. Simply put, such overt questioning would detract from the rationale behind a naturalistic observational setting.

A second criticism of observational study is that it merely detects and describes a phenomenon, and does not really allow the researcher to explore the underlying intentions that generate the observed behaviours (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Interviews, on the other hand, are useful for ascertaining the reasons underlying the participant's behaviour (Esterberg 2002). Indeed, the primary objective of this thesis, and the reason for adopting an interpretivist approach, was to understand why people avoid brands; thus, interviews were deemed to be more appropriate in this instance.

The third problem with employing an observational approach in the current research was related to the limited time and budget available for a doctoral thesis. Given the difficulty of observing brand avoidance in action, the extra time required to accompany participants on their shopping trips and to discuss their purchase decisions would have made the observation of consumers less practical than interviews.

Thus, not only does observation lack the ability to increase understanding of why someone avoids a brand, it may also be more costly. Furthermore, because most acts of anti-consumption are inherently difficult to observe (Wilk 1997a; Wilk 1994), interviewing participants was considered to be the most straightforward approach to learning about the brand avoidance phenomenon.

Given the disadvantages of purely observational methods and the suitability of in-depth interviews, one further criticism of the method employed in this thesis may be why in-depth

interviews were not conducted *in situ*, for instance, in the participants' homes or at a location of their choice. Certainly, one advantage of using an observational interview method would be the ability to catalogue the brands owned by participants and to use these brands as an 'auto-driving' prompt during the interview (McCracken 1988). A further advantage would be the detection of scenarios where participants have selected the brands for which they claim to have avoidance attitudes. Thus, in this method, tension between the desire to avoid a certain brand and the contradictory behaviour of owning the brand at home could be explored further. Although *in situ* interviews were frequently used in previous studies of consumer resistance, several reasons exist to justify why one to one interviews conducted at a university office, instead of *in situ*, were deemed suitable for this thesis.

First, this thesis was primarily focused on the brands that consumers chose to avoid, so it was assumed that there would be limited occurrence of these avoided brands in the participant's homes. Second, although scenarios did exist in which people stated avoidance of a brand but also purchased that brand, those participants were not hesitant in disclosing the fact that their behaviour was inconsistent with their attitudes; as evidenced by the many self-contradicting responses gained through the probe: 'When was the last time you selected the brands we have been talking about?'

There are also several logistical reasons justifying the use of office interviews for the purposes of this thesis:

- 1) It was logical to invite people to a professional location, which was within easy reach of all parties involved.
- 2) Interviewing in an office is a standard and accepted procedure at The University of Auckland.
- 3) Some people, especially women, may have been more reluctant to have a male stranger visit their home. Thus, insisting on a home visit has the potential to further restrict the type of people recruited.
- 4) It has been argued that informants are more likely to provide an 'honest' response if a comfortable professional distance is established between interviewer and interviewee. When the research relationship becomes too 'familiar', 'friendly', or 'close to home', which is more likely as the research environment takes on a more naturalistic setting, informants may feel a greater need to partake in impression management and provide socially desirable responses (McCracken 1988). Thus, in-depth interviews in a professional setting, not only minimises the level of physical intrusion into the participant's private life, but also reassures the participant that the

inquiry is of a professional nature, rather than an evaluation of him or her as a person.

- 5) When compared to a location, such as a public café, the security and privacy of an office may be more conducive to full disclosure from the participant.
- 6) The quiet office environment ensures the sound quality of the interview tape recording, which was essential for transcription purposes.

The final limitation of this thesis lies in the fact that in-depth interviews are social interactions and, thus, may suffer from some forms of bias; impression management, experimenter bias, and social desirability effects (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). Furthermore, as a social interaction, the information divulged by the interviewee may be in a constant state of co-creation, as the participant is compelled to reflect on past experiences as a result of the interviewing process. Additionally, if a feeling or concept cannot be articulated by the interviewee, the researcher may have to partake in some degree of interpretation (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

Thus, it is likely that the information gathered will be influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the participant, which is inevitable in all grounded theory and hermeneutical endeavours. The risk of course is that the quotes may not accurately reflect the participant's true meaning. Although the researcher in the current study attempted to maintain trustworthiness by remaining as neutral as possible, effects, such as those mentioned, are not completely preventable. However, the co-construction of meaning between participants and the interviewer is considered an inescapable part of any interpretive research, hence the theoretical perspective, epistemology, and ontology adopted by the researcher. Thus, this limitation is a not short coming as such, but is simply considered to be inherent in the relationship between researcher, knowledge, and reality.

6.4 Future Research

Anti-consumption is a topic that is growing in interest, and, as a consequence, there is much opportunity for other researchers to add to this burgeoning area. Based on the implications and limitations of this thesis, several avenues of future research are now put forward.

A potential criticism of this study may be its reliance on one type of data, that is, interview dialogue. While this limitation has been addressed to some extent in the previous section, future research should incorporate additional forms of data in order to triangulate, extend, or challenge the findings of this thesis. Therefore, observational data could be used where feasible. Furthermore, given the increasing numbers of anti-branding and consumer

resistance sites, and the candour with which informants on the internet are able to speak their minds, netnography is a highly relevant methodological tool that holds great potential for future research in this area.

Also of importance would be the exploration of brand avoidance in consumers belonging to the lower socio economic classes. The study of brand avoidance is interested in the deliberate rejection of brands that consumers can afford to buy. Thus, the recruitment of participants in this thesis was based on people who had the financial power to make choices (middle to upper class). However, in most developed nations, even consumers on low incomes are able to make choices between brands, and as a consequence, consumers from lower socio economic classes do have the capacity to practice brand avoidance. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the brand avoidance behaviour of underprivileged consumers with the findings discovered in this thesis.

Although mainstream multi-national brands such as *McDonald's* and *Starbucks* have a large consumer base, it could be argued that some of the brands mentioned during this thesis were never intended to target the participants of this thesis. Thus, future research could purposely seek out and interview members of some avoided brands' target markets. First, the type of person who fits the profile of a brand's target consumer needs to be identified. Then interviews may be conducted to investigate if those consumers still have brand avoidance attitudes towards the brands that are supposed to be targeting them. Results of such studies should help to bridge the gap between the theoretical contributions of this thesis and the practical requirements of managers.

Though this thesis adheres to constructionism, another avenue of research from a positivist perspective could be a large scale empirical validation of the emergent theory. In such cases, quantitative data could be used to extend the current findings to a context beyond the demographic limitations set by the sample of this thesis. Therefore, future research could develop questionnaires from the conceptual framework and investigate whether or not the emergent themes of this study are also applicable to a wider population.

Similarly, the ability to understand which reasons endure, are least resistant to change, and are most predictive of behaviour, would add to the practical application and academic appreciation of brand avoidance. To this end, follow-up interviews with some of the original participants of this study could be carried out. Alternatively, longitudinal surveys could be conducted to ascertain which categories account for the greatest variance in terms of predicting, preventing, or stopping brand avoidance behaviour. The most significant brand avoidance categories, or the negative brand promises with the most impact, should be the factors that marketing managers pay particular attention to, in terms of preventing avoidance

from occurring in the first place. Similarly, the avoidance antidotes that account for the most variance in predicting the re-selection of a brand, could be implemented as recovery strategies.

Future studies could also investigate which reasons, within this emergent theory of brand avoidance, result in the strongest avoidance behaviour, and which are the simplest to alleviate. For instance, since identity and deficit-value avoidance comprises third party information rather than lived experience, it is fair to assume that the attitudes formed may be weaker than those developed from experiential avoidance, or actual experience (Hoch 2002; Hoch and Deighton 1989; Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith and Swinyard 1983).

Moral avoidance was driven, to some extent, by a concern for the wider community (socially detrimental promises) as opposed to the other types of avoidance that were motivated by the negative impact that the brand had on the individual. Future research could investigate whether brand avoidance attitudes developed from a broad ideological focus are more or less predictive of behaviour than brand avoidance attitudes centred on the individual. The argument could go both ways. A focus on individual needs and wants is more salient and concrete; thus, attitudes with this level of immediacy could be proposed to have a more direct impact on behaviour. This argument would suggest that identity and deficit-value avoidance may be more predictive of brand avoidance behaviour. On the other hand, the reasons for moral avoidance were based on values and principles, and therefore may be an integral part of the individual's way of life. In this case, moral avoidance may be the more consistent brand avoidance attitude.

Worth mentioning, is the concept of 'inauthenticity'. Though the word was never explicitly mentioned by informants, analysis of interviews does suggest that lack of authenticity might be an underlying factor that subconsciously connects several of the brand avoidance themes in this thesis. For instance, it formed a link between some aspects of the 'undesired self', 'avoidance group', and 'deindividuation'. It also played a subtle role in some of the reasons for the moral avoidance of multi-national brands. Similarly, other research posits that a lack of authenticity is a primary motivator of 'voluntary simplification' (Zavestoski 2002a; Zavestoski 2002b), another anti-consumption phenomenon.

Currently, the relationship between authenticity and consumption is primarily a 'Western' concept (Handler 1986). According to various academics (Etzioni 1998; Soloman 2002; Zavestoski 2002b) authenticity is something that is strived for only once lower level needs are met. As mass production, commercialisation, and capitalism spreads into the less affluent nations (Etzioni 1998), the search for authenticity may become relevant to consumers in every corner of the world. Though many researchers are already involved in

the area of authenticity (Beverland 2006; Costa and Bamossy 2001; Goulding 2000; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Grayson and Shulman 2000; Kozinets 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004), more exploration is needed on the topic of 'inauthenticity' and its impact on the relationship between the consumer and the brand.

The incidence of 'erosion' (a drop in repeat purchases/behavioural brand loyalty) in most product categories (East and Hammond 1996), and the fact that even satisfied customers may not always be loyal (Oliver 1999), raises an interesting possibility. One type of purchase decision may consist of the consumer first avoiding the brands that he or she really hates; once those have been eliminated from the consideration set, the consumer is free to select any of the remaining options. This strategy might be a simpler decision task than specifically choosing one brand out of the many alternatives. Thus, in certain circumstances, consumers may not be selecting brands they really love; instead, they might simply be purchasing brands that they do not hate enough to avoid, or selecting brands which they are unable to avoid. A similar notion was discussed in chapter five, which elaborated on the impact that 'incompatible promises' had on increasing the attractiveness of competing brands. This thesis suggests that some cases of brand loyalty may actually be manifestations of brand avoidance. The argument follows that perhaps brand loyalty is not as prevalent as its academic coverage makes it out to be. Thus, future studies should discern which attitude, out of brand loyalty or brand avoidance, is more predictive of consumers' actual purchasing behaviour and which of the two are longer lasting. Similarly, the data revealed that negative WOM may be more powerful than positive WOM. Thus, future studies should also investigate which of the two exerts a more powerful effect on the consumer's attitudes and behaviour. In other words, is negative WOM regarding a brand more likely to motivate brand avoidance, or is positive WOM more likely to lead to brand selection?

Future studies could also examine which avoidance antidotes are easiest to establish and maintain. For instance, connecting a brand within a network may be a highly effective method of restricting avoidance. However, infiltrating existing networks might be costly to maintain and difficult to arrange, especially if linking an unfavourable brand to a favourable brand involves more risk for one party than the other. Additionally, this research and previous studies suggest that consumers stay with unsatisfactory service providers when they believe that there are high costs to switching (inertia) (Panther and Farquhar 2004). Thus, it might be easier to prevent avoidance by increasing switching costs and relying on inertia as a real barrier to leaving. However, apart from the obvious ethical concerns of 'ensnaring' consumers, the negative feelings generated by consumers who feel trapped in an unsatisfactory relationship may be even more detrimental to the firm in the long term. For instance, previous research in the area of consumer retaliation suggests that retaliation is

more likely to occur if the consumer feels that he or she cannot easily leave a relationship (Huefner and Hunt 2000). In any case, until further research investigates these assumptions and the other marketing implications mentioned earlier, some of the recommendations made in this thesis may only remain hypothetical.

With regard to avoidance antidotes, the conceptual framework of brand avoidance developed in this thesis organised the categories beginning from those where the organisation had a high level of control from the company (genuine adaptation), through to those where the organisation had less control on the company's part (positive WOM and sampling solution). Depending on the number of disgruntled consumers, and the type of product or service that the company offers, perhaps a 'sampling solution' is the easiest method of encouraging consumers to repurchase the brand, while a genuine change of the entire company's policies might be too costly to justify. As one academic suggests, "Bad notice about sweatshops may cut into profit margins, but maybe not as much as the cost of shifting production to places that treat employees better" (Reich 1998 p. 369). Future research should discern which antidotes are short-term fixes versus long-term strategies, and which are straightforward to initiate and have the 'biggest bang for buck', as opposed to antidotes that are simply impractical given the company's circumstances.

The 'dark side' of brand avoidance is an intriguing issue that could be explored further in the future. As this thesis demonstrates, some participants avoid multi-national companies and hegemonic brands that originate from foreign countries because they perceive those brands to be detrimental to society. Brand avoidance, in these cases, is partly based on the belief that supporting a local company/brand may be more beneficial for the immediate society in which the consumer resides. Therefore in the minds of the participants, the 'right' thing to do is to avoid socially detrimental brand promises. However, this view could also be argued to be highly ethnocentric, that is, focused only on local goals. Thus, if such a movement were to gain popularity, there could be some other potentially 'detrimental' side effects. For example, if many multi-national brands were avoided and the subsequent demand for these products were to decline, the dark side of brand avoidance could manifest itself as the large scale redundancy of factory and production lines workers in developing nations.

Furthermore, local manufacturers are unable to capitalise on the same economies of scale and cheap labour force on which large multi-nationals base their businesses. For example, consider the expense of attempting to manufacture cars locally or any other product not currently made in a consumer's country of residence. The sourcing of fuel would be highly arduous, the production of most consumer goods (currently made in China) would be more costly, and the growth of out of season fruit would require vast amounts of energy.

Consequently, a further detrimental effect brought about by brand avoidance of large company brands, would be the raising cost of goods, and the trickle down effect would be an increased cost of services.

As the price of the most basic goods increase substantially, the implications for families within the lower socio-economic spectrum may be extremely negative. Therefore, although the moral avoidance of multi-national and hegemonic brands may be well intentioned to begin with, ironically, if taken to the extreme, moral avoidance may also have its own socially detrimental consequences. Thus, future research should seriously consider this potentially dark side of brand avoidance.

Brand avoidance and its relationship with the resource-based view of the firm is another area where further research could prove valuable (Barney 1991; Barney et al. 2001; Srivastava et al. 2001; Srivastava et al. 1998). In this thesis, a novel but hypothetical relationship was asserted; namely, the continual long term avoidance of a brand may result in the brand becoming a market-based liability. Indeed, the participants who stated their brand avoidance attitudes and behaviours of certain brands were also less likely to purchase them than other competing brands. However, the impact of these attitudes and behaviours on the financial bottom line are not assessed by this thesis. Thus, one area ripe for research is the question of whether or not consumer brand avoidance will actually impact on brand equity from a financial perspective. Future studies in the area of brand metrics could attempt to measure the financial existence and impact of negative brand equity. That task might be the first step in validating the notion of the brand as a market-based liability, as innovatively proposed in this thesis.

Finally, in contemporary marketing, brand equity can be conceptualised from various non-mutually exclusive perspectives: consumer, relational, financial, or network (Brodie, Glynn, and Van Durme 2002). Since only end-consumers were interviewed, the consumer perspective of brand equity was the main focus of this study. However, the overall concept of brand avoidance is postulated to affect all four perspectives of brand equity, as discussed in chapter five. Thus, future investigation from orientations other than the end-consumer perspective might also be of interest and could hold considerable managerial potential, such as, the effect of brand avoidance and the resultant negative brand equity, on business-to-business relationships and co-branding alliances.

6.5 Conclusion

As stated at the outset of this thesis, unhappy customers provide a rich source of learning for both academics and practitioners. Unfortunately, this source has often been ignored, as

most conventional brand management focuses on brand selection, brand loyalty, and consumer preferences. This thesis addresses the gap in research by exploring the reasons why brands are avoided. Indeed, one general contribution of this thesis is that it offers a new perspective with which to view consumer behaviour and brand management.

Using a grounded theory approach and 23 in-depth interviews, qualitative data was gathered to help shed light on two areas of interest: the motivations for brand avoidance, and the conditions where the occurrence of brand avoidance is restricted or alleviated.

In terms of the reasons for brand avoidance, many incidents of brand avoidance emerged from the qualitative data and were coded into four main categories: 'experiential', 'identity', 'deficit-value', and 'moral avoidance'. The notion of negative brand promises was introduced as an original way to understand the motivation underlying each brand avoidance category. Participants avoided various brands because of the 'undelivered', 'symbolically unappealing', 'value inadequate', or 'socially detrimental' promises that the brand represented to them. Therefore, this thesis contributes, for the first time, a multi-dimensional understanding of brand avoidance.

With regards to managing brand avoidance, several factors prevent participants from avoiding brands (inertia, perceived lack of alternatives, influence of others, and low product involvement). However, most of these factors are beyond the control of a firm. In contrast, 'avoidance antidotes' consists of strategies that help to restrict or alleviate the participant's current avoidance of a brand. In relation to the brand promises perspective, brand avoidance may be cured if negative brand promises are 'transformed', 'diversified', 'enhanced', or 'restored'. This thesis is the first study to specifically explore the circumstances in which brand avoidance may be prevented or stopped.

This thesis contends that an 'incompatible brand promise' is the core construct that unites the various brand avoidance categories. An emergent theoretical model of brand avoidance is developed that combines this core construct and the other main constructs discovered in this thesis. The model also positions brand avoidance within the wider consumption system and links brand avoidance to other pertinent concepts such as brand equity and competing brand promises. The emergent model provides, for the first time, an integrative and comprehensive understanding of brand avoidance.

In terms of marketing implications, knowing why consumers develop brand avoidance attitudes and having strategies to deal with brand avoidance may be substantial advantages one company could have over its competitors. Therefore, this thesis makes an important contribution to marketing by increasing the level of understanding, and the amount of

knowledge, in the area of brand avoidance. Being aware of the theoretical reasons that motivate brand avoidance (and the factors that restrict it) provides marketing managers with several tactics to ensure that their brands remain healthy. Most of the reasons for brand avoidance are within reasonable control of the firm. Thus, the elementary step in dealing with brand avoidance is to stop negative brand promises from developing in the first place. Failing that, an attempt may be made to restrict or alleviate brand avoidance by implementing some 'avoidance antidotes' that transform, diversify, enhance, or restore negative brand promise.

Overall, this thesis addresses all of its research questions and, in doing so, achieves all of its objectives. This thesis provides a specific and substantial academic contribution by presenting an innovative, integrative, and comprehensive understanding of brand avoidance. This thesis also makes a valuable managerial contribution by arguing for a more balanced perspective towards brand management and by considering the circumstances in which brand avoidance is restricted or alleviated. Lastly, this thesis offers a general contribution to consumer behaviour by increasing knowledge in the area of anti-consumption. In conclusion, this thesis provides valuable answers to the important question: Why do people avoid brands?

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Appendix 1- Brand Definitions

Perspective	Brand Definition	Function of brand
<p>The brand is viewed from the firm's perspective; for instance, what does a brand do for its company?</p> <p>The development of the brand is also seen as relying on the 'input' of the firm. Communication regarding the brand is 'one-way' from the firm to the consumer.</p>	1. Legal Instrument	The brand is used by the firm as a mark of ownership and as legal protection from imitation by its competitors.
	2. Logo	The brand is used as a name or symbol to differentiate one company's products from their competitors.
	3. Company	The brand is used as a unifying force for the entire corporation. A consistent message is conveyed to all stakeholders so that the products, culture, employees and CEO all work towards the same goals.
	4. Identity system	The brand is holistically made up of culture, personality, self-projection, physique, reflection, and relationship. The resulting unique identity communicates a consistent and integrated vision to all stakeholders. This allows for better strategic positioning and protection from imitation.
<p>The brand is viewed from the consumer's perspective.</p> <p>Development of the brand is also seen as being influenced by both the organisation and the consumers that use the brand.</p>	5. Shorthand	The brand represents a number of functional and symbolic characteristics. The brand acts as a mental shortcut and memory cue to make information processing easier for the consumer.
	6. Risk reducer	The brand acts as an informal contract between the consumer and the company ensuring consistent quality or reliable service.
	7. Image	The brand is what consumers perceive it to be, and is made up of the consumer's perceptions of functional and psychological attributes.
	8. Value system	Organisations imbue their brands with certain values; consumers are driven by their own values. Consumers can also assign values to brands. Thus, the success of the brand depends not only on the functional aspects of the brand, but also on the match between the values that the brand represents and the values of its target market.
	9. Personality	Each brand symbolises a combination of psychological traits. The match between the consumer's and the brand's personality influences his or her attitudes towards the brand.
	10. Relationship	The brand is personified as an entity that interacts with its consumers. A successful brand is one that has successful relationships with its customers.
	11. Added value	In addition to its functional benefits, customers also use a product for its non-functional benefits. When a brand is construed to satisfy the consumer's symbolic needs and wants more closely, the brand adds unique value above and beyond functional attributes.
Brand development is driven by the consumers' activities.	12. Evolving entity	The brand starts as a product of the organisation and gradually becomes a product of its consumers.

Various definitions of brands (adapted from de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998)

Appendix 2- Functional versus Symbolic Associations

Literature	Symbolic associations	Functional associations
(Gardner and Levy 1955)	Consumers consider the social and psychological nature of products. They aspire to emulate people of higher status.	Consumers aim to be economical, and pursue cost effective bargains.
(Levy 1959)	New consumers purchase things based on what they mean. Items that are 'symbolically harmonious' with consumer's life are easier to purchase. Goods are symbolic of personal attributes and goals and social status. Consumers ask themselves "Do I want this?"	Traditional 'economic' perspective of consumers suggest that purchases are based on functionally orientated, practical, and concrete values such as price, quality, durability. Consumers ask themselves "Do I need this?"
(Swan and Combs 1976)	Expressive performance in clothing, style, aesthetics, sexual attraction.	Instrumental/physical performance with regards to clothing, fibre, seams, colour, durability.
(Park et al. 1986)	Desire for products that fulfil an internal need such as self-enhancement, or association with desired self-image or referent group. Strategic positioning should initially emphasise the brand's relationship with the appropriate self-image or desired group. The brand should then be linked to other symbolically similar brands or products to produce a lifestyle image, while making the brand less desirable or inaccessible to non-targeted markets.	Desire for a product is motivated by problem solution goal, such as the solution of an existing problem, or prevention of a future problem. Strategic positioning should initially emphasise differences in performance compared to competitors, across a variety of usage situations. The brand should then be linked to other functionally superior brands in different product categories.
(Belk et al. 1989)	Sacred consumption experiences that are regarded as special, 'value-expressive', and more extraordinary than the utility for which consumption was originally intended.	Profane consumption experiences described as the ordinary consumption for the functional purposes required in everyday life.
(Keller 1993)	Symbolic benefits such as self-expression, prestige, and relationship between brand and self-concept. Non product-related attributes such as user imagery.	Functional benefits such as problem removal, safety, and other basic motivational needs. Product-related brand attributes, such as physical components and utility. Non-product related attributes such as price information, product packaging and appearance, and usage imagery. Experiential benefits and social approval.
(Aaker 1996)	Brands are used by consumers for their emotional and self-expressive benefits.	Brands can also be used for their functional tangible benefits, product attributes.

The functional and symbolic categorisation of brand associations

Appendix 2- Continued

Literature	Symbolic associations	Functional associations
(Graeff 1996)	Purchase based on self-concept and brand image congruency. Consumers' decisions are based on what they think of themselves and how others may view them. This is especially relevant when goods are publicly consumed.	When goods are privately consumed, self-concept is not activated during the consumption process. Thus, purchase is based on functional attributes and consumers ask themselves concrete questions such as what the product does and what the tangible benefits are.
(Aaker 1997)	Symbolic self-expressive use of brands through their human characteristics. Brand personality.	Product related attributes serving a utilitarian function.
(Brown and Dacin 1997)	The brand may symbolise corporate responsibility and other associations not directly related to products or services, such as sponsorship, community involvement, philanthropy, EEO, and environmental friendliness.	The brand may stand for corporate ability, associations that directly related to products or services, such as manufacturing expertise, technological innovation, customer orientation, superiority of research and development, and industry leadership.
(Escalas 1997)	Brands are used as meaningful symbols.	Brands also have instrumental, tangible attributes.
(Bhat and Reddy 1998)	Symbolic and expressive. Hedonic emotional approach, such as prestige, personality expression, self-image and social image enhancement.	Functional and utilitarian. Rational information processing approach to satisfy immediate and practical needs.
(de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1998)	Brands can represent symbolic values.	Brands can also have functional capabilities.
(Mehta 1999)	Preference for brand based on match with self-image or ideal-self during advertisement.	Preference for brand based on functional or informational claims during advertisement.
(Ligas 2000)	Products can be used for self expression, define the individual's characteristics, and communicate with wider society	Products can accomplish a task and have utility.
(Chen 2001)	Non-functional attributes and corporate social responsibility.	Functional product attributes and corporate ability.
(Belen del Rio, Vazquez, and Iglesias 2001)	Brand use is dictated by emotional and symbolic evaluation, such as taste, pride, and desire to reinforce belonging to a group.	Brands are selected by practical functional evaluation, such as usage effectiveness, value for money, reliability.
(Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001)	Hedonic value was defined as pleasure potential of a product.	Utilitarian value is defined as the ability to fulfil functions required in everyday life

The functional and symbolic categorisation of brand associations

Appendix 3- Ethics Approval



THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND

Research Office
Office of the Vice-Chancellor
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland 1, New Zealand
Level 2, 76 Symonds Street
Auckland, New Zealand
Telephone: 64 9 - 373 7599 ext 87956
Facsimile: 64 9 - 373 7432

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

10 April, 2003

MEMORANDUM TO:

Dr. J. Motion

Marketing

Re: Change to application

I wish to advise you that the Committee met on 9 April, 2003 and reviewed the request for change to your application titled "A pluralistic investigation of brand avoidance" (Our Ref. 2003 / 039).

The Committee approved the change.

If the project changes significantly you are required to resubmit your application to the Committee for further consideration.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, it would be appreciated if you could notify the Committee once your project is completed.

Please contact the Chairperson if you have any specific queries relating to your application. She and the members of the Committee would be most happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics provisions if you wish to do so.

Margaret Rotondo
Executive Secretary
University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department, Marketing

M.S.W. Lee

3N/6 Burgoyne Street,
Auckland

Appendix 4- Advertisement for Participants

DO YOU BUY STUFF?

WANT A \$20 GIFT VOUCHER?

I'm a PhD student doing my thesis on the opinions and behaviours of everyday consumers.

As part of my research I am running several semi-structured interviews. If you buy any goods or services, I'd love to have a chat with you about your purchasing decisions.

Not only will you get a chance to share your views and contribute to some exciting new theory development at the University of Auckland, you may also learn something about your own purchasing behaviour!

As a small token of my eternal gratitude you will receive a \$20 gift voucher!

Interviews will take up to 2 hours, but I assure you that the time will fly! So if you are interested in helping, please contact me below to find out more!

Mike Lee: maw.lee@auckland.ac.nz
Work: 3737-599 extn. 86984
Mob. 021 123 1371 txt me
After hours 360-5295

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Appendix 5- Interview Participant Information Sheet



Marketing department,
Level 1, Commerce B,
Building 113,
Symonds Street, Auckland

Title: Pluralistic investigation of Brand Avoidance

To: In-depth Interview Participants

My name is Mike Lee I am a student at The University of Auckland enrolled for a PhD in the Department of Marketing. I am conducting this research for the purpose of my thesis on Brand Avoidance and have chosen this field because it is a relatively new, interesting, and under-researched area.

You are invited to participate in my research and I would appreciate any assistance you can offer me. As part of my thesis I am conducting a series of in-depth interviews to investigate in detail what brands, consumers such as yourself, avoid; and the reasons why you choose to avoid them. By taking part in the interview not only will you be contributing to the development of new theories in academic research, but you will also learn more about a new area of marketing, and gain additional insight into your own consumption behaviour.

I would like to interview you, but you are under no obligation at all to participate. Interviews would take about 1.5-2 hours. I would like to audiotape the interview but this would only be done with your consent. Third parties such as the Foundation of Research, Science and Technology, may wish to use some of the data obtained from this study, and I will publish the results of the study in scientific journals. Your name will not be used in any publication about this research, any information you provide cannot be traced back to you without your consent, and you will not be identified. You can choose to withdraw yourself from the interview at any time, and request to omit any information you provide to the study up to 48 hours after the interview.

If you wish to be interviewed please let me know by filling in the attached Consent Form, and sending it to me at: Mike Lee, Dept. of Marketing, University of Auckland, Private bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand. All information you provide in an interview is confidential and your name will not be used.

Thank you very much for your time and help in making this study possible. If you have any queries or wish to know more please phone me at home at the number given above or write to me at:

Michael Shyue Wai Lee	My supervisor is :	The Head of Department is:
msw.lee@auckland.ac.nz		
	Dr. Denise Conroy	Professor Peter Danaher
Department of Marketing	Department of Marketing	Department of Marketing
The University of Auckland	The University of Auckland	The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019	Private Bag 92019	Private Bag 92019
Auckland.	Auckland.	Auckland.
Tel. 373-7999 extn. 86984	Tel. 373-7999 extn. 87286	Tel. 3737-7999 extn 88277

For any queries regarding ethical concerns please contact:

The Chair, The University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee,
The University of Auckland, Research Office - Office of the Vice Chancellor, Private Bag 92019,
Auckland. Tel. 373-7999 extn 7830

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE on 9/04/2003 for a period of 4 years, from 9/April/2003 Reference 2003/ 039

Appendix 6- Demographic Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Gender: Male Female

2. Age: _____

3. Ethnicity: _____

4. Highest qualification: _____

5. Occupation (please be specific): _____

6. Yearly Income: Less than Zero \$1-\$5000
 \$5001-\$10,000 \$10,001-\$15,000
 \$15,001-\$20,000 \$20,001-\$25,000
 \$25,001-\$30,000 \$30,001-\$40,000
 \$40,001-\$50,000 \$50,001-\$70,000
 \$70,001-\$100,000 \$100,001-More

7. Living circumstances: Single person dwelling
 With unrelated people
 With immediate family
 With extended family
 With partner
 With partner and child/children
 With child/children only
 Other _____

Appendix 7- Experiential Avoidance

Category	Main themes	Sub themes
<p><u>Experiential Avoidance-</u> Avoidance due to negative first hand experiences where the brand promise was undelivered.</p>	<p>Unmet Expectations- The socially constructed expectations regarding the brand's performance are unmet and the brand is subsequently re-constructed in the mind of the consumer to become a reminder of the negative consumption experience.</p>	<p>Poor performance- A basic level of performance is promised by most brands. When this fundamental promise is not delivered, such experiences may result in subsequent brand avoidance.</p> <p>Hassle factor- Avoidance due to the added inconveniences associated with a negative brand experience, such as wasted time and energy.</p> <p>Negative store environment- Avoidance of brands due to a negative store environment and shopping experience.</p>

Appendix 8- Identity Avoidance

Category	Main themes	Sub themes
<p><u>Identity Avoidance-</u> Avoidance is motivated by symbolically unappealing brand promises from which the consumer wishes to distance him or herself.</p>	<p>Undesired Self- Avoidance because the meaning conveyed by the brand represents an image that either the consumer would not like to include in his or her self-concept, or is incongruous with the existing perceptions the consumer has of him or herself.</p>	<p>Negative reference group- Avoidance due to the negative perceptions associated with the types of people that typically use that brand.</p> <p>Inauthenticity- Consumers do not believe that the brand genuinely conveys what it is supposed to; they perceive the brand to be fake and lacking authenticity.</p> <p>Deindividuation- Avoidance of brands because they are perceived to be mainstream. Thus, consuming the brand takes away the consumer's sense of individuality.</p>

Appendix 9- Deficit-value Avoidance

Category	Main themes	Sub themes
<p><u>Deficit-value Avoidance-</u> Avoidance of brands is motivated by value inadequate promises, which are unable to fulfil the consumer's utilitarian requirements.</p>	<p>Unacceptable Trade-off- Avoidance because a low benefit to cost trade-off is associated with the brand name. For instance, brands may be avoided owing to a lack of quality. In these cases, even though the price of the brand was considered low, it was not considered low enough to justify the lack of quality. Alternatively, high quality brands may also be avoided. In these cases the quality of the brand was not deemed an important enough benefit to justify the excessively high cost of the brand.</p>	<p>Unfamiliarity- lack of familiarity with a brand may result in perceptions of inadequate value and may lead to brand avoidance.</p> <p>Aesthetic insufficiency- Avoidance of brands due to unattractive packaging and or colours. The consumer perceives that dull packaging reflects low quality. Or in some cases aesthetic beauty was valued as an end in itself.</p> <p>Food favouritism- Owing to the relationship between food and health, some participants avoided the food products of a brand but not the non-consumables of the same brand.</p>

Appendix 10- Moral Avoidance

Category	Main themes	Sub themes
<p>Moral Avoidance- Brand avoidance is motivated by ideological reasons. The way in which a brand, company, or country operates is perceived to have a damaging impact on wider society. The brand is negatively re-constructed in the mind of the consumer to become representative of a socially detrimental promise, and the participants feel a moral obligation to avoid the brand.</p>	<p>Country Effects- Brand avoidance is influenced by the country from which brand originates or the country with which the participants identify.</p> <p>Anti-hegemony- Reasons for avoiding brands that are seen as dominating or globalising the world. Avoidance that displays similar properties to the phenomena of consumer resistance. Counter-cultural attitudes and behaviours that aim to question the current capitalistic system, resist dominant and oppressive forces, and reduce consumption. Typically multinational or very large brands are targets of anti-globalisation.</p>	<p>Animosity- Avoidance due to the negative moral associations of the country from which the brand originates. The brand and the country become intermingled in the mind of the consumers so the two come to share the same negative meaning.</p> <p>Financial patriotism- participants avoided certain brands because of the negative impact those brands are believed to have on their country of residence. Specifically, some participants believe that multinational companies may take their profits to other countries where the company deems appropriate, and consider this as less beneficial than keeping the profit within the New Zealand economy.</p> <p>Monopoly resistance- A company which has a monopoly is no longer required to provide consumers with extra value for money or anything innovative, since they have no competition to be compared against. Hegemonic brands are also rejected in order to prevent the subsequent reduction of alternatives, diversity, and freedom of choice independent from the influence of larger conglomerates.</p> <p>Impersonalisation- Avoidance due to the brand stripping away the human aspects of the product or service, resulting in a lack of personal connection with the agents of the brand.</p> <p>Corporate irresponsibility- Avoidance due to perceptions of environmental and/or social irresponsibility by the brand's company. Typically, only the large companies are held accountable for their actions, as they are under higher scrutiny and their impact is seen as larger. Additionally, due to their success, consumers believe that they should be setting an example for other smaller companies.</p>

Appendix 11- Avoidance antidotes

Category	Main themes	Sub themes
<p>Avoidance Antidotes- The conditions that may remedy current brand avoidance.</p>	<p>Transforming Promises- A pervasive change in brand identity may be able to transform a negatively re-constructed brand promise, thereby alleviating brand avoidance.</p>	<p>Genuine adaptation- Brand avoidance may be alleviated if a solemn attempt to change the brand's faults were initiated from the highest point and permeated throughout the entire company. This must be perceived by the consumer to be different from mere damage control. In spite of this, some scepticism and cynicism might still remain.</p>
	<p>Diversifying Promises- By expanding the company's brand portfolio the company is able to create new promises, which may not be perceived as negative.</p>	<p>Sub-branding- Avoidance of the company's main brand may not extend to sub-brands, which contain a different set of associations. Therefore, although the original brand may still be avoided, the parent company profits when the sub-brand is selected.</p>
	<p>Enhancing Promises- Brand avoidance may be cured through the use of several strategies that enhance negative brand promises.</p>	<p>Value augmentation- Alleviating avoidance by increasing value for money. Increase perceptions of quality while maintaining existing price, or discount the brand while maintaining existing quality. Even if the drop in price is temporary, this may be enough to encourage consumers to give the brand another trial</p>
		<p>Image adaptation- Avoidance remedied by a changing of image. Altering the superficial perception of that brand by the consumer.</p>
		<p>Network formation- Avoidance of brand may be alleviated if relationships, strategic alliances, or supply agreements, are formed with other brands that the consumer currently selects. The formation of business relationships not only makes the brand harder to avoid, but it may also enhance consumers' perceptions of the brand.</p>
		<p>Positive WOM- Positive WOM from informal or formal independent trusted sources may alleviate brand avoidance attitudes.</p>
	<p>Restoring Promises- If avoidance is motivated by an undelivered promise leading to a negative consumption experience, then restoring the broken promise may cure the brand avoidance.</p>	<p>Sampling solution- If a free sample is able to elicit a positive consumption experience, this restores the undelivered brand promise and the consumer may reassess their brand avoidance attitudes. Samples may also encourage trials of unfamiliar brands.</p>
	<p>Irreconcilable Promises- In some cases participants will remain suspicious and cynical towards the negative brand promise despite the various attempts to transform, diversify, enhance, or restore those promises.</p>	<p>Incurable avoidance- Cases where brand avoidance is so intense that no foreseeable practical remedy can be implemented.</p>